ROUGH GUIDES

Rough Guide DIRECTIONS

Orlando

& Walt Disney World®

VISIT…

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Orlando
& Walt Disney World®

DIRECTIONS

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Introduction to Orlando

Since a certain animator chose its farmland as the Florida home for his theme parks, Orlando has become synonymous with Walt Disney World, and the sunny Disney vibe pumps relentlessly through the veins of this sprawling place. There's just no way to avoid its impact – not that you necessarily want to. After all, while Orlando may hold all the trappings of an important city, with galleries, festivals, and the best nightlife in Central Florida, they serve more as a counterpoint; you're either here to escape into the fantasies that Disney, Universal Orlando, and other ancillary theme parks offer up or you're on the wrong vacation.

Walt Disney World is so large and spellbinding that it would be easy enough to spend several visits exploring its various attractions. Besides its four state-of-the-art theme parks – the signature Magic Kingdom,

▲ Magic Kingdom

When to visit

Central Florida enjoys a pleasant year-round climate. The winters are generally mild, although occasional nighttime frosts do occur. Average temperatures in Orlando during this time are 61–67°F (16–19°C): very comfortable for touring the theme parks, but still a little chilly for the water parks. The temperatures and the humidity rise to hotter and stickier levels in the summer, when the thermometer hovers at 78–83°F (26–28°C); outside of the winter holidays, this is the busiest time of year in Orlando. January, May, and September are traditionally quieter months for the theme parks; however, convention-goers tend to fill the hotels in January, so a spring or early fall vacation is probably more ideal.

science-oriented EPCOT, Disney's Hollywood Studios, and the peerless Disney's Animal Kingdom – come other superbly devised diversions, including two entertaining water parks and a modern sports complex. In short, Disney is escapism at its imaginative and psychological best.

Universal Orlando and SeaWorld Orlando, which followed in Disney's wake, were both quick to establish their own stellar reputations. Universal competes with Disney head-on, offering more white-knuckle thrill rides but a less magical atmosphere, while SeaWorld Orlando stands out as one of the country's best marine parks. Together these three destinations are the staples of most Orlando trips.

That hasn't stopped a bewildering number of other, lesser attractions from materializing to satisfy almost any whim or desire: you can swim with dolphins, throw hot-dogs at alligators, skydive, and even witness the resurrection of Christ – all for a price, of course. In the midst of this royal battle for the tourist dollar, it comes as a pleasant surprise to find some well-stocked museums and art galleries, several relaxing parks and lakes, and diverse cultural events

▼ Discovery Cove

▲ Daytona Beach

in downtown Orlando and its northern suburbs. A visit to these parts offers a glimpse into Orlando's unheralded sophistication – and provides the perfect antidote to theme-park burnout.

Busch Gardens
18

▲ Busch Gardens

Sophistication can also be found in the city's fair share of gourmet restaurants and trendy urban eateries – though just as many visitors take advantage of the chain restaurants and inexpensive buffets blanketing the area. As for nightlife, downtown Orlando buzzes with a vibrant and eclectic after-dark scene; there are bars and clubs to suit all tastes.

Once finished with the theme parks and the city, the Kennedy Space Center, Tampa's theme park, Busch Gardens, and the beach are all a short drive away.

Orlando

AT A GLANCE

WALT DISNEY WORLD

This is why everyone comes to Orlando – and rightly so. Disney has no equal when it comes to fantasy fulfillment, attention to detail, and revealing the child in us all. Its four main theme parks, full of amusement rides, wild animals, Disney characters, kids' shows, and stylized architecture, are the obvious draws, although a motor speedway, golf courses, resort hotels, and shops and restaurants galore offer something for everyone.

UNIVERSAL ORLANDO

While it may lack some of the magic of its nemesis Disney, Universal Orlando more than makes up for it with faster, edgier rides that appeal as much to grown-ups as to their offspring. Universal Studios offers a slew of memorable attractions based on your favorite films; Islands of Adventure boasts Orlando's highest concentration of thrill rides; CityWalk is where the evening's entertainment takes place.

Incredible Hulk Coaster at Islands of Adventure

Wishes at the Magic Kingdom

Believe at SeaWorld Orlando

SEAWORLD ORLANDO AND DISCOVERY COVE

Animals – especially those that swim – take center stage at Orlando's third main theme park, SeaWorld Orlando, where several live shows wow the crowds. Across the road, Discovery Cove is a more exclusive park where visitor numbers are limited and time in the water with dolphins is the big draw.

INTERNATIONAL DRIVE

This lively, garish drag is to Orlando what The Strip is to Las Vegas. Hotels, restaurants, and every attraction imaginable are all within walking distance or a short bus ride of one another – which is rare in sprawling Orlando.

Lake Toho Lighthouse at dawn

DOWNTOWN ORLANDO

Orlando's bustling downtown has been in the midst of an exciting rejuvenation for a number of years, with trendy new bars and restaurants opening with great regularity around Orange Avenue and in the chic Thornton Park district.

Shari Sushi in downtown Orlando

THE NORTHERN SUBURBS

Museums and galleries, parks and lakes, and a strong sense of community characterize the small towns of Winter Park, Eatonville, and Maitland, just to the north of downtown Orlando.

WINTER PARK
FARMERS MARKET

Farmers' Market in Winter Park

KISSIMMEE

Beyond Orlando's southern city limit lies the town of Kissimmee, which is no less spread out than Orlando but does have more attractive, rural scenery and lower-key attractions compared with those to the north. The US-192 highway that traverses this area is lined with some of Central Florida's most affordable accommodation.

Ideas

The big six

Most people come to Orlando to visit its renowned theme parks. The city does boast other worthwhile attractions, but the parks are by far the main draw. Each of the biggies has its own unique atmosphere, and it's quite possible to spend your entire vacation flitting from one magical land to another without ever seeing the other Orlando. Walt Disney World contributes four outstanding parks to the mix, including the mother of all theme parks – the Magic Kingdom – and a zoo like you've never seen before, while the two Universal Orlando and Anheuser-Busch parks provide an appealing range of other divertissements.

▲ Discovery Cove

Enjoy VIP treatment and no crowds at this exclusive park, where the main attraction is swimming with undersea creatures.

P.120 ▸ SEAWORLD ORLANDO AND DISCOVERY COVE

▲ Islands of Adventure

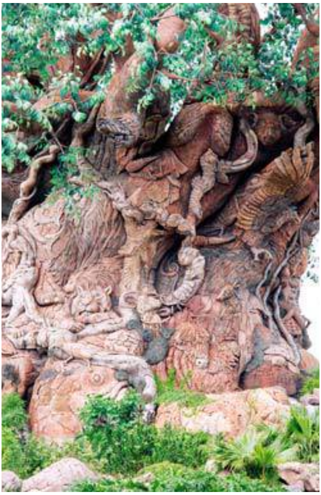
If rollercoasters are your thing, you'll be spoilt for choice at this park, where you don't have to be in diapers to enjoy most of the rides.

P.102 ▸ ISLANDS OF ADVENTURE

▲ Magic Kingdom

Very much the theme park for kids and kids-at-heart, the Kingdom's still casting its spell nearly forty years after opening.

P.49 ▸ THE MAGIC KINGDOM



▲ Disney's Animal Kingdom

Only Disney could turn what is essentially a zoo into a wilderness park where you really feel like you're on an adventure in Asia and Africa.

P.75 ▸ DISNEY'S ANIMAL KINGDOM

▲ Universal Studios

Live out your favorite movie moments on cutting-edge rides at this park, which doubles as a working production studio.

P.95 ▸ UNIVERSAL STUDIOS

▼ SeaWorld Orlando

The animals are the stars at Florida's best marine park, especially when they take center stage in the entertaining live shows.

P.115 ▸ SEAWORLD ORLANDO AND DISCOVERY COVE

Music and dance

Given the cultural prominence of the theme parks, Orlando's performing arts scene is unexpectedly vibrant. Opera and ballet are both taken quite seriously, as is the classical music played at the long-running annual Bach Festival. Along with these high-brow offerings, touring musicians from many different genres usually make a stop at one of the city's several concert venues.

Hard Rock
CAFE

▲ Opera and ballet

The well-regarded Orlando Opera and Orlando Ballet each stage four or five shows a year.

P.136 ▸ DOWNTOWN ORLANDO

▲ House of Blues

Enjoy blues, jazz, and soul performances in the concert hall, or gospel singers at Sunday brunch in the Southern-style restaurant.

P.92 ▸ DOWNTOWN DISNEY

▲ Bach Festival

In late February and early March top orchestras and musicians come from all over to perform the works of Bach and other great composers.

P.181 ▸ ESSENTIALS

▶ The Social

An intimate downtown concert venue with as much character as the alternative rock bands and other non-mainstream acts that play there.

P.136 ▸ DOWNTOWN ORLANDO

▼ Hard Rock Live

Check out such varied acts as Marilyn Manson or Willy Nelson at one of the city's best musical venues.

P.114 ▸ CITYWALK

FRIDAY JULY 29
@ THE SOCIAL
ARS OF FIREWORKS
IN STORE
HILLIPS
THE ULTIMATE LED ZE

Adrenaline rush

The longest waiting lines are invariably for the rides that promise – and normally deliver – heart-pounding, nerve-jangling thrills and spills. With their massive frames towering hundreds of feet into the air, the rollercoasters are the most intimidating of these, although water slides and gravity-defying drops from great heights are equally effective at making you scream.

▲ Dueling Dragons

Try to sit in the front row to get the full effect of the narrowly avoided collisions of these two "dueling" coasters.

P.104 ▸ ISLANDS OF ADVENTURE

▼ The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror

Experience moments of weightlessness as you travel through The Fifth Dimension in a creepy hotel's service elevator.

P.69 ▸ DISNEY'S HOLLYWOOD STUDIOS

SERVICE ELEVATOR

▲ Sheikra

Tampa's Busch Gardens is every bit the equal of Orlando's theme parks when it comes to thrill rides – and this is one of the best.

P.157 ▸ DAY-TRIPS

▼ Kraken

Vertigo sufferers and those with weak constitutions will want to avoid this incredibly high, fast, and long rollercoaster.

P.117 ▸ SEAWORLD ORLANDO AND DISCOVERY COVE

▲ Summit Plummet

The tallest and fastest water slide in the US is a nearly vertical drop, unmitigated by seats, harnesses, and other such reassurances.

P.83 ▸ THE REST OF WALT DISNEY WORLD

Grown-up diversions

Touring the theme parks with children in tow can be mentally and physically draining. The kids' boundless energy combined with the plethora of infantile rides that you'll be forced to go on will inevitably leave you exhausted. Fortunately, there are opportunities in all the parks for grown-ups to indulge themselves every now and then. These diversions often come in the form of alcohol breaks, notably the free beer on offer at the Anheuser-Busch parks.

Walt Disney World
SPEEDWAY
1-800-BE-PETTY
43
MONTE CARLO

▲ **Sunbathing at the water parks**

Sneak off to the deck chairs on the sandy beaches and relax while the kids wear themselves out on the slides.

P.83 ▸ THE REST OF WALT DISNEY WORLD

▶ Richard Petty Driving Experience

Forget the rollercoasters – this ride around a NASCAR speedway in a stock-car is for hardcore speed junkies.

P.85 ▸ THE REST OF WALT DISNEY WORLD

MONTE CARLO
SPEEDWAY
1-800-BE-PETTY

▲ Pre-show at Clyde & Seamore Take Pirate Island

Before this show's juvenile antics begin, a mime artist pokes fun at arriving spectators without much concern for theme park political correctness.

P.122 ▸ SEAWORLD ORLANDO AND DISCOVERY COVE

▼ Finnegan's Bar & Grill

This is the closest that any theme park restaurant comes to creating a party atmosphere for adults, due in part to the live music – but mostly the Guinness.

P.101 ▸ UNIVERSAL STUDIOS

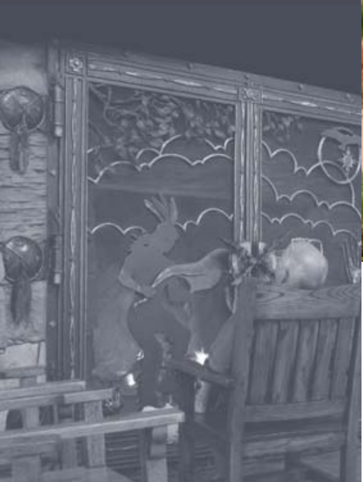
▼ Anheuser-Busch Hospitality Center

One of the very rare freebies at a theme park just so happens to be beer at the Anheuser-Busch–owned SeaWorld Orlando and Busch Gardens.

P.119 ▸ SEAWORLD ORLANDO AND DISCOVERY COVE

Theme hotels

It's a testament to the seamless quality of Walt Disney World and its commitment to total escapism that leaving the theme parks at the end of the day doesn't necessarily mean the fantasy has to end. Numerous resort hotels are scattered around Disney property, each with their own romantic ambience and the attention to detail for which Disney is so famous. Universal Orlando has followed suit in recent years and guests at its themed resorts receive perks at its parks.



▲ Grand Floridian Resort & Spa

Disney's most luxurious hotel is a throwback to what vacationing in Florida must have been like before the masses arrived.

P.165 ▸ ACCOMMODATION

CASTLE HOTEL

▲ DoubleTree Castle Hotel

One of the few theme hotels outside of Disney and Universal, this one takes the form of a turreted castle along International Drive.

P.170 ▸ ACCOMMODATION

▲ Animal Kingdom Lodge

Consider paying a little extra for the privilege of waking up in the morning and seeing African wildlife grazing outside your window.

P.169 ▸ ACCOMMODATION

▲ Wilderness Lodge

This peaceful log-cabin lodge with wood-burning fireplaces feels worlds away from theme park hustle and bustle.

P.168 ▸ ACCOMMODATION

▼ Portofino Bay Hotel

Universal's delightful image of a quaint Italian seaside village comes with every comfort imaginable.

P.170 ▸ ACCOMMODATION

▲ Polynesian Resort

Sprawl out on the beach under palm trees at this imitation of a Polynesian beach hotel.

P.168 ▸ ACCOMMODATION

Sports and outdoor activities

There's no question that the most popular sporting activity in Orlando is golf. You'll find five eighteen-hole courses on Disney property alone, and many other big resorts have their own courses. Other outdoor adventures include taking a ride in a hot-air balloon or exploring the countryside on a horse. At Disney's Wide World of Sports, you can watch a host of sporting events, both amateur and professional.

▲ **Orlando Magic**

Tickets are surprisingly affordable to watch Orlando's only major league professional sports team play basketball.

P.136 ▸ DOWNTOWN ORLANDO

▲ **Horseback riding**

A sedate amble on horseback makes for a relaxing way to take in the Orlando outdoors.

P.152 ▸ SOUTH OF ORLANDO

▲ Disney's Wide World of Sports

You can watch everything from school soccer tournaments to the Atlanta Braves baseball team in spring training at this multifaceted sports venue.

P.84 ▸ THE REST OF WALT DISNEY WORLD

▼ Hot-air balloon trip

The ultimate bird's-eye view of Orlando is from a hot-air balloon.

P.153 ▸ SOUTH OF ORLANDO

▲ Golf

Orlando is a golfers' paradise, where every other green space seems to be a golf course.

P.182 ▸ ESSENTIALS

▲ Daytona 500

The most prestigious NASCAR race of the year takes place in nearby Daytona Beach in February.

P.181 ▸ ESSENTIALS

After dark

Although both Disney and Universal make a stab at offering hip nightlife venues, only downtown Orlando truly delivers appealing places to go after dark, from trendy lounges to dive bars. That said, many visitors forego the clubs in favor of staying on at the theme parks until closing time, when shows such as EPCOT's Illuminations: Reflections of Earth provide a fittingly spectacular climax.

▼ Roxy

If hip-hop is your flavor, head to this nightclub to rub shoulders and hips with a young crowd. Retreat to the balcony for a view or to a VIP room for bottle service.

P.139 ▸ DOWNTOWN ORLANDO

▼ Cricketers Arms

This Orlando take on the friendly British pub is ideal for those homesick for televised soccer matches, fish'n'chips, and warm beer.

P.130 ▸ INTERNATIONAL DRIVE AND AROUND

◀ Adventurers Club

The best nocturnal diversion at Disney's Pleasure Island is not a nightclub, but a quirky and slightly surreal 1930s gentleman's club, with eclectic performances throughout the night.

P.93 ▸ DOWNTOWN DISNEY

▲ Illuminations: Reflections of Earth

Disney's original nighttime extravaganza still does a great job of lighting up the skies with fireworks and other effects.

P.65 ▸ EPCOT

▲ CityWalk

Universal Orlando does a better job than Disney at creating a relatively happening nightlife scene, epitomized by mainstream hot spots such as *the groove*.

P.109 ▸ CITYWALK

▼ Downtown Orlando

Nowhere in Orlando – and arguably Central Florida – comes close to matching downtown's supremely varied choice of bars, lounges, and clubs, especially on Orange Avenue.

P.138 ▸ DOWNTOWN ORLANDO

dragon room

Amusement rides

In addition to the obligatory high-speed rollercoasters, there are a number of different styles of rides at the theme parks. Flight simulators are used with visual effects to take you on a journey to remote and exotic destinations. Ground- or water-based buggies travel sedately through lands populated by Audio-Animatronics robots in various human, animal, and extra-terrestrial forms. Or an entire adventure could take place as you sit and watch 3-D images pass before your bespectacled eyes.

THE AMAZING ADVENTURES OF
SPIDER-MAN

The Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man

A strong candidate for Orlando's best all-round attraction, combining sensory effects, a touch of speed, and a popular theme to great effect.

P.103 ▸ ISLANDS OF ADVENTURE

Mickey's
PhilharMagic
Kodak

Mickey's PhilharMagic

The latest 3-D attraction to grace Walt Disney World takes you on a truly magical journey with Daffy Duck and friends.

P.51 ▸ MAGIC KINGDOM

▲ Soarin'

The simple charm of this ride demonstrates that Disney doesn't always need an elaborate theme to deliver a memorable experience.

P.61 ▸ EPCOT

▼ Kilimanjaro Safaris

This ride comes about as close as you can to re-creating an African safari, with the help of some of the continent's most recognizable animals and imaginative landscaping.

P.76 ▸ DISNEY'S ANIMAL KINGDOM

▼ Expedition Everest – Legend of the Forbidden Mountain

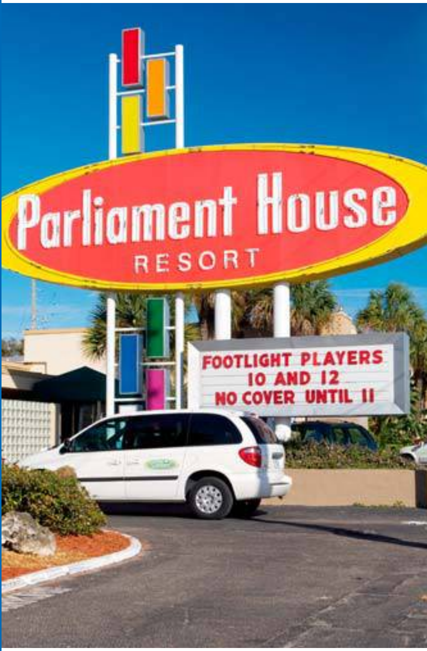
Some rollercoasters travel at slower speeds so that you can fully enjoy the accompanying storyline – and this is the most impressive of the genre.

P.77 ▸ DISNEY'S ANIMAL KINGDOM

Gay Orlando

In Orlando you'll find a combination of the more liberal attitudes that prevail in southern Florida and the conservatism that characterizes the north of the state. The relatively modest gay scene here seems to represent the state's balance. A few nightclubs have established decent reputations, while Parliament House is a full-on gay resort. The theme parks, meanwhile, are arguably as popular among gays as they are among kids during the annual Gay Days event.

Dexter's
of Thornton Park
CAFE ◆ WINE BAR
AND GOURMET GROCERY
808


Parliament House
RESORT
FOOTLIGHT PLAYERS
10 AND 12
NO COVER UNTIL 11

▲ **Parliament House**

Bars, drag queens, hotel rooms, and even a beach, all in one location, make this the equivalent of Orlando's gay theme park.

P.171 ▸ ACCOMMODATION

▲ **Pulse**

Come to this stylish and eclectic nightclub for its great sound system, special lighting effects, and some risqué live entertainment.

P.139 ▸ DOWNTOWN ORLANDO

Dexter's
Café • Wine Bar
Pilsner Urquell
Brewed in PLZEN • CZECH | THE ORIGINAL PILSNER

▲ The Courtyard at Lake Lucerne

This historic hotel with plenty of charm and character extends a warm welcome to gay visitors.

P.171 ▸ ACCOMMODATION

◀ Thornton Park

Gays tend to gravitate to this refined neighborhood to enjoy its trendy shops, cafés, and restaurants.

P.133 ▸ DOWNTOWN ORLANDO

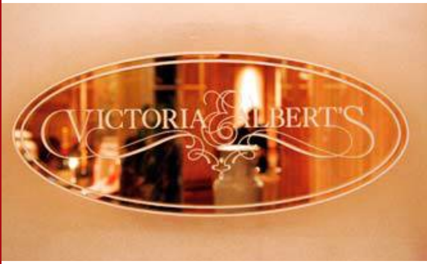
▼ Gay Days

Thousands of gays and lesbians visit en masse to rub shoulders with Mickey and Minnie during four very surreal days at Disney (and Universal).

P.182 ▸ ESSENTIALS

Best restaurants

As an antidote to the all-you-can-eat buffets, chains, and themed dining experiences – not to mention the uniform fast-food outlets at the parks – you may welcome a visit or two to some of Orlando's more renowned restaurants. The area has more than its fair share of pricey gourmet restaurants – primary locations are Walt Disney World, International Drive, and downtown Orlando – but you don't have to spend much at select other eateries to enjoy a high level of quality and service.



▲ Victoria & Albert's

If you reserve well enough in advance at this posh Disney restaurant, you can be attended to by the chef himself – a memorable experience.

P.87 ▸ THE REST OF WALT DISNEY WORLD

▼ Jiko – The Cooking Place

Dishes with a dash of spice, all washed down with excellent South African wines, make this one of the most cosmopolitan of Disney's upscale restaurants.

P.87 ▸ THE REST OF WALT DISNEY WORLD

Ming Court

This superb Asian restaurant has gourmet fare for surprisingly low prices.

P.130 ▸ INTERNATIONAL DRIVE AND AROUND

Seasons 52

Enjoy a fresh and healthy meal before trying your luck at flirting at the adjoining piano bar.

P.131 ▸ INTERNATIONAL DRIVE AND AROUND

HUE – A Restaurant

One of downtown Orlando's places to be seen, where sipping a cocktail at the bar with good-looking posers is as much fun as dinner.

P.137 ▸ DOWNTOWN ORLANDO

Christini's Ristorante Italiano

You'll find Orlando's best Italian restaurant in an area near International Drive known as "restaurant row" by locals.

P.129 ▸ INTERNATIONAL DRIVE AND AROUND

Cooling off

Although Orlando isn't on the coast, there are still plenty of places to cool off - and you'll find that water is used in quite inventive ways to drench people. You can escape the summer heat at the water parks, both at Disney and elsewhere, splash about in the swimming pools that you'll find at almost every hotel, or zip down flume rides (water-based rollercoasters), where much of the fun is in getting soaked.

▲ Disney's water parks

Disney's two water parks, Blizzard Beach and Typhoon Lagoon, offer a welcome respite during the humid months.

P.83 & P.84 ▸ THE REST OF WALT DISNEY WORLD

▲ Playing with dolphins

For many, simply being in the water next to these gentle and enigmatic creatures will trump any of Orlando's more elaborate entertainment options.

P.120 ▸ SEAWORLD ORLANDO AND DISCOVERY COVE

▲ Daytona Beach

It may be on the slightly tacky side, but this seaside town with a sandy beach is just a fifty-mile drive from Orlando.

P.160 ▸ DAY-TRIPS

▲ Dudley Do-Right's Ripsaw Falls

No other flume ride in Orlando will get you as wet as this one.

P.103 ▸ ISLANDS OF ADVENTURE

◀ Hotel swimming pools

The larger resort hotels often boast multiple swimming pools in all shapes and sizes, or like the *Ritz-Carlton Orlando*, have a heated one to enjoy even when it's cool outside.

P.165 ▸ ACCOMMODATION

◀ Wet 'n' Wild

Conveniently located on International Drive, this lively water park is packed with exciting rides for the whole family.

P.124 ▸ INTERNATIONAL DRIVE AND AROUND

Museums and galleries

One of the main reasons for coming to downtown Orlando and its northern suburbs is to peruse the notable museums and galleries. Start with the paintings at the Orlando Museum of Art, drop into the Orlando Science Center if you have children to entertain, and then head up to a few more specialized collections in Winter Park and Maitland. You'll be pleasantly surprised to find so many worthy outlets of high culture in a city known more for mass consumerism.

MUSEUM OF ART

▲ Charles Hosmer Morse Museum of American Art

Louis Comfort Tiffany's spectacular Art Nouveau lamps and windows are the indisputable highlights here.

P.140 ▸ THE NORTHERN SUBURBS

▲ Orlando Science Center

The interactive, hands-on displays go some way toward making science interesting for the kids, while everyone will enjoy the IMAX-style films.

P.136 ▸ DOWNTOWN ORLANDO

▲ Orlando Museum of Art

Orlando's dynamic little art museum presents American art from the nineteenth century to the present day.

P.135 ▸ DOWNTOWN ORLANDO

▲ Telephone Museum

The wonderful collection of vintage telephones celebrates the entrepreneurial genius of a Maitland grocer nearly one hundred years ago.

P.143 ▸ THE NORTHERN SUBURBS

▶ Albin Polasek Museum and Sculpture Gardens

Beautiful gardens provide the perfect backdrop for Czech sculptor Albin Polasek's liturgical, mythical, and classical sculptures.

P.142 ▸ THE NORTHERN SUBURBS

◀ Orange County Regional History Center

Come here for a revealing glimpse of what Orlando looked like before the arrival of Disney – nothing like the city you see today.

P.135 ▸ DOWNTOWN ORLANDO

Shopping

Ignoring the tacky souvenir stalls, Orlando's shopping opportunities basically fall into two categories. There are the upmarket antique shops and art galleries, many of which are found along Park Avenue in Winter Park - these are fun for browsing even if the price-tags will normally deter a purchase. And then there are the outlet shopping malls dotted all over town, where you'll have a hard time not buying the much-reduced name-brand clothes and accessories.

▼ Scott Laurent Galleries

One of the best art and gift galleries along Park Avenue, featuring some beautiful items that you might actually use.

P.146 ▸ THE NORTHERN SUBURBS

▼ Renningers Antique Center

Many of Central Florida's antique dealers sell their wares at this popular weekend market.

P.162 ▸ DAY-TRIPS

Calphalon
Calvin Klein
Calvin Klein

WELCOME
WELCOME

▲ Orlando Premium Outlets

You can do more than mere window-shopping for designer clothes at these factory outlet stores with knockdown prices.

P.129 ▸ INTERNATIONAL DRIVE AND AROUND

▶ Flea World

If you look hard enough, you could find the hidden gem that justifies the short drive from Orlando to this huge flea market.

P.162 ▸ DAY-TRIPS

▼ World of Disney

Disney's merchandising HQ, stocking a broad cross-section of the souvenirs that you've seen at the parks.

P.91 ▸ DOWNTOWN DISNEY

Orlando deals

Hidden beneath the masses of publicity hyping everything visitor-related to the nth degree, you'll find some useful ways to economize through discounts and deals. Even Walt Disney World, usually so adept at making you spend more than you'd planned, offers opportunities to save money – sometimes even in the form of freebies.

▲ Multi-park, multi-day tickets

Spreading your time at the major parks over several days saves you money on admission prices and is much more relaxing to boot.

P.179 ▸ ESSENTIALS

NICKELODEON

▲ Kids eat free

The little ones will certainly have an appetite after a day at the parks, so take advantage of the free food that many hotels offer to kids provided that mom and dad pay for their own meals. Nickelodeon Family Suites by Holiday Inn is one of them.

P.169 ▸ ACCOMMODATION

Discount coupons

Dismiss the coupons you see virtually everywhere at your peril, since the reductions they offer in restaurants, malls, hotels, and attractions really add up.

P.176 ▸ ESSENTIALS

Orlando/Orange County Convention & Visitors Bureau, Inc.
the card that saves you money
PREFERRED VISITOR MAGICARD
ORLANDO

All-Star Resorts

Staying on Disney property was too expensive for most until these budget resorts opened.

P.168 ▸ ACCOMMODATION

Disney's Magical Express

Book yourself in to a Disney hotel and they'll pick you up or drop you off at the airport completely free of charge.

P.175 ▸ ESSENTIALS

MAGICAL EXPRESS

Green Orlando

You don't have to travel too far out of Orlando to immerse yourself in nature. Lakes provide much of the fun – along with your best chances of spotting wildlife – while protected areas such as the Blue Spring State Park and The Disney Wilderness Preserve are excellent places to simply get away from it all. In the city itself, meanwhile, you'll find several attractive parks and gardens that afford a welcome break from the concrete and traffic.

▲ **Harry P. Leu Gardens**

The city's botanical gardens offer a visual and olfactory treat for plant and flower enthusiasts.

P.136 ▸ DOWNTOWN ORLANDO

▲ **Blue Spring State Park**

Observe manatees in the wild at this attractive park boasting springs with year-round warm temperatures.

P.159 ▸ DAY-TRIPS

▶ A World of Orchids

At this shop crammed with almost every orchid imaginable, the pleasure is in the looking as much as the buying.

P.153 ▸ SOUTH OF ORLANDO

▼ Lake Eola

Right in the heart of downtown Orlando, this pretty lake and its surrounding park are prime spots for unwinding after work.

P.133 ▸ DOWNTOWN ORLANDO

▲ Airboat ride on a Florida swamp

Feel the wind in your hair as you zip across a Florida lake, always on the lookout for alligators, bald eagles, and other local wildlife.

P.150 ▸ SOUTH OF ORLANDO

▼ The Disney Wilderness Preserve

To mitigate the environmental impact of their massive theme parks, Disney took steps to ensure that no construction would ever take place on this peaceful 8500-acre patch of land.

P.152 ▸ SOUTH OF ORLANDO

Live shows

There's hardly a moment in Orlando when someone somewhere is not rehearsing to impress a crowd. The theme parks combine their rides and attractions with live shows of a very high standard and big names such as Cirque du Soleil have made the city their permanent home. You can even eat dinner while being entertained at one of several show restaurants.

▼ Arabian Nights Dinner Show

The star performers are undoubtedly the beautiful horses, among them the Black Stallion, a gift from the creator of the eponymous fictional horse.

P.154 ▸ **SOUTH OF ORLANDO**

▼ Pets Ahoy!

Nifty tricks executed with aplomb by a cast of incredibly sweet cats, dogs, and other familiar creatures.

P.122 ▸ **SEAWORLD ORLANDO AND DISCOVERY COVE**

▶ Indiana Jones Epic Stunt Spectacular!

This slick production makes falling out of windows, engaging in fist-fights, and other such stunts look so easy that you should advise the kids not to try them out when they get home.

P.72 ▸ DISNEY'S HOLLYWOOD STUDIOS

◀ Universal Horror Make-Up Show

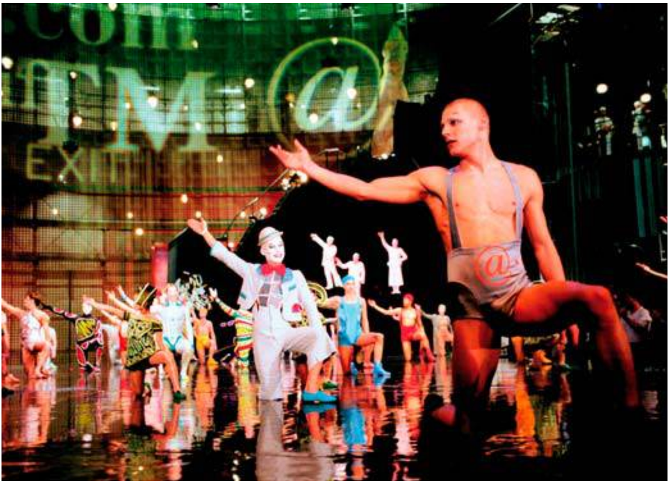
Gory special effects are used to completely terrorize a hapless member of the audience – you'll be hard pressed not to laugh your guts out while she screams.

P.101 ▸ UNIVERSAL STUDIOS

▼ Cirque du Soleil

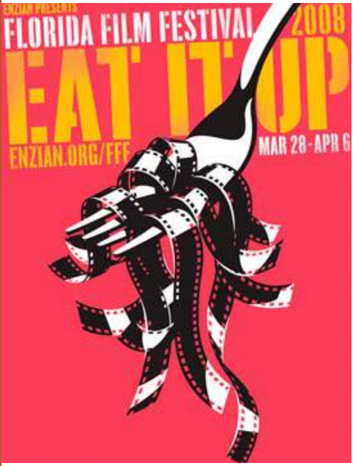
Spend a surreal night in the company of all-swinging, all-jumping, all-bending acrobats and gymnasts.

P.90 ▸ DOWNTOWN ORLANDO



Orlando calendar

Beyond the theme parks, Orlando is one of Florida’s liveliest cities, with a full calendar of festivals and events. The Florida Film Festival boasts a fine nationwide reputation, the city hosts two professional golf tournaments, and the Silver Spurs Rodeo attracts a select field of cowboys.


ENZIAN PRESENTS
FLORIDA FILM FESTIVAL
2008
EAT IT UP
ENZIAN.ORG/FFF
MAR 28-APR 6

▲ Florida Film Festival

Take a break from Hollywood blockbusters and sample a documentary, an animated film, or some Floridian cinema at this annual festival.

P.182 ▸ ESSENTIALS

▲ PGA Tour events

Once you’ve hacked your way around one of Orlando’s many golf courses, see how it’s meant to be done at either of the two professional golf tournaments held in the city each year.

P.181 ▸ ESSENTIALS

▶ Daytona Bike Week

The most infamous yearly gathering of thousands of leather-clad bikers takes place in the nearby seaside town of Daytona Beach.

P.181 ▸ ESSENTIALS

▲ Halloween Horror Nights

When the sun goes down, one (or both) of the Universal parks are opened up to those who don't mind things that go bump in the night.

P.182 ▸ ESSENTIALS

▼ Silver Spurs Rodeo

The fact that Kissimmee hosts the most important rodeo east of the Mississippi is testament to Central Florida's cattle-rearing past.

P.181 ▸ ESSENTIALS

Offbeat Orlando

The quest of independent and adventurous tourists is to find an original idea in a city saturated with every fly-by-night attraction and trivial diversion imaginable. Fortunately, you'll discover several out-of-the-ordinary attractions in Orlando itself or just a short drive away. Nowhere is more off the beaten path than the spiritualists' village of Cassadaga, while Celebration, The Villages, and the Cypress Cove Nudist Resort & Spa are the havens of the rich, the old, and the naked respectively.

▲ Cypress Cove Nudist Resort & Spa

Nudism is strongly encouraged at this resort – but be sure to support the wobbly bits when playing tennis and jogging, for example.

P.172 ▸ ACCOMMODATION

▲ Celebration

Disney's idea of what the ideal American community should look and feel like is brought to life in this picture-perfect town where wholesome values reign.

P.148 ▸ SOUTH OF ORLANDO

▼ Gatorland

Orlando's oldest park continues to thrive amidst stiff competition by showcasing Florida's ever-fascinating alligators in a fun and friendly atmosphere.

P.148 ▸ SOUTH OF ORLANDO

▼ Cassadaga

The spiritualists who have made this village in the middle of a forest their home will gladly dispense advice and guidance if you cross their palms with silver.

P.158 ▸ DAY-TRIPS

ESTABLISHED 1894
CASSADAGA
SPIRITUALIST CAMP
BOOKSTORE • INFORMATION
CERTIFIED MEDIUMS & HEALERS

▲ Reptile World Serpentarium

Marvel as George VanHorn extracts venom from his collection of deadly snakes – no better proof that one man's pleasure is another man's poison.

P.151 ▸ SOUTH OF ORLANDO

▼ The Villages

Understand why people choose to retire in Central Florida by staying at this sumptuous seniors community for a few nights.

P.157 ▸ DAY-TRIPS

Places

The Magic Kingdom

Opened in 1971, the Magic Kingdom has much in common with the original Disney theme park, Disneyland, built in California in 1955. Beyond the rides, shows, and costumed characters, the template is the same: a rose-colored vision of life coupled with an unrivaled attention to detail and a whole-hearted commitment to keeping visitors happy. The dramatic Cinderella Castle lies in the middle of it all, surrounded by seven themed sections: Main Street, U.S.A.; Adventureland; Frontierland; Liberty Square; Tomorrowland; Fantasyland; and Mickey's Toontown Fair. The latter two are very much for youngsters, bursting at the seams with Disney characters and tame rides, although the whole park emphasizes fantasy and family fun over thrills and spills. The longest waiting lines are frequently for attractions that either take you on a nostalgic journey to your childhood, or make you curse your gullibility, such is the variation in their quality. A few edgier rides, notably Space Mountain and Big Thunder Mountain Railroad, provide a welcome change of pace.

Main Street, U.S.A.

Once past the entrance gates, the first photograph to be snapped is usually at the start of Main Street, U.S.A., a nostalgic re-creation of a busy turn-of-the-twentieth-centuryAmerican shopping street, with the Cinderella Castle rising in the distance. It's a picturesque introduction to the Magic Kingdom; while walking past its shops note the names painted on the upper floors of the buildings – they commemorate some of the people who were instrumental in the creation of Disney World, and are intended to serve as the opening credits to the extravaganza that follows.

For park hours, prices, and FASTPASS information, see "Theme park practicalities" in Essentials.

Cinderella Castle

At the end of Main Street, U.S.A. the most identifiable landmark in Disney World is a striking pseudo-Rhineland palace with eighteen towers, rising 189 feet. It is, however, an empty shell, housing much of the machinery required to

Insider tip

Upon entering the park, don't be seduced by the appealing facades of old-fashioned town-square stores: they are all gift shops. Walk straight towards the Cinderella Castle and turn left – fewer people tend to tour the park in a clockwise direction – starting at Adventureland and working towards Tomorrowland.

Orientation

The Magic Kingdom has a circular layout, with its seven distinct "lands" built around the famous Cinderella Castle icon. Upon entering the park, everyone has to walk up **Main Street, U.S.A.**, which leads to a junction just in front of the Cinderella Castle. Turning left at this junction and working your way around the park in a clockwise direction brings you first to **Adventureland**, with its jungle scenery and emphasis on exotic animals. **Frontierland** lies just to the north, inspired by the Wild West and dominated by the Big Thunder Mountain Railroad. Across a large lake (but accessible via a path from either Frontierland or Adventureland), **Liberty Square** is a relatively small area commemorating America's colonial heritage. Next comes the kid-oriented **Fantasyland**, where various fairytales are brought to life in rides and shows, and the multicolored **Mickey's Toontown Fair**, a whimsical village in which Mickey and Minnie Mouse are supposed to live. Finally, in the easternmost section of the park, **Tomorrowland** provides a glimpse into the future, with many of the attractions having something or other to do with outer space.

run the rest of the park. An immensely popular character-dining restaurant (see p.57) operates in the structure itself, but otherwise there's little else to do inside. The Castle is particularly photogenic during the spectacular fireworks display (see p.56) just before the park closes.

Jungle Cruise

Adventureland. FASTPASS accepted. Commentary by a pun-crazy guide is intended as half the fun of this slow boat ride down the Amazon, the Nile, the Congo, and the Mekong, where the Audio-Animatronics animals – from crocodiles to elephants, depending on which "river" you're navigating – look slightly less realistic in the cold light of day. The boats, accommodating twenty or so people, go at a pace gentle enough for the youngest visitors, and the occasional roars, screeches, and sprays of water provide the tiniest blips of excitement on what is generally a bland ride. The jokes, however, come so thick and fast that after a while they start to sound quite clever – another devious Disney mind-trick.

▲ JUNGLE CRUISE

Pirates of the Caribbean

Adventureland. The *Pirates of the Caribbean* films have breathed new life into this venerable attraction, and now Captain Jack Sparrow crops up repeatedly on your boat ride around an island infested with pirates behaving very badly. Disney's masterful laundering of X-rated themes such as drunkenness, sex, and violence is the great achievement here. You'll pass burning buildings, dueling pirates, and even a "buy a wench for your bride" auction on a cruise that's

▲ PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN

slow enough to allow careful inspection of the fabulously detailed sets and characters.

Splash Mountain

Frontierland. Minimum height: 40”/102cm. FASTPASS accepted. Like most flume rides, apart from a 52-foot drop guaranteed to get you wet, there are few scary moments. Enjoy this one, then, as much for Br’er Rabbit’s adventures – depicted with Disney’s exemplary attention to detail – as for its thrill factor. When not in freefall, the hollowed-out-log boats travel slowly enough for you to follow the storyline (which basically involves Br’er Rabbit being chased by Br’er Fox and Br’er Bear) and admire the Audio-Animatronics characters that appear along the way. The big drop comes as a bit of a shock to the senses after you’ve been softened up by the cute animals and with the strains of songs such as Zip-A-Dee-Do-Da still ringing in your ears.

Big Thunder Mountain Railroad

Frontierland. Minimum height: 40”/102cm. FASTPASS accepted. A runaway train careers through a deserted mine in this longstanding rollercoaster, still popular on account of its well-conceived theme and convincing setting in the heart of the Wild West. The idea is similar to the spectacular new Expedition Everest – Legend of the Forbidden Mountain (see p.77) at Disney’s Animal Kingdom, and it must be said that this ride in rather tepid in comparison. On the other hand, it does reach speeds that will excite rather than terrify most kids, and – along with Space Mountain – will be the ride they’ll remember most.

The Haunted Mansion

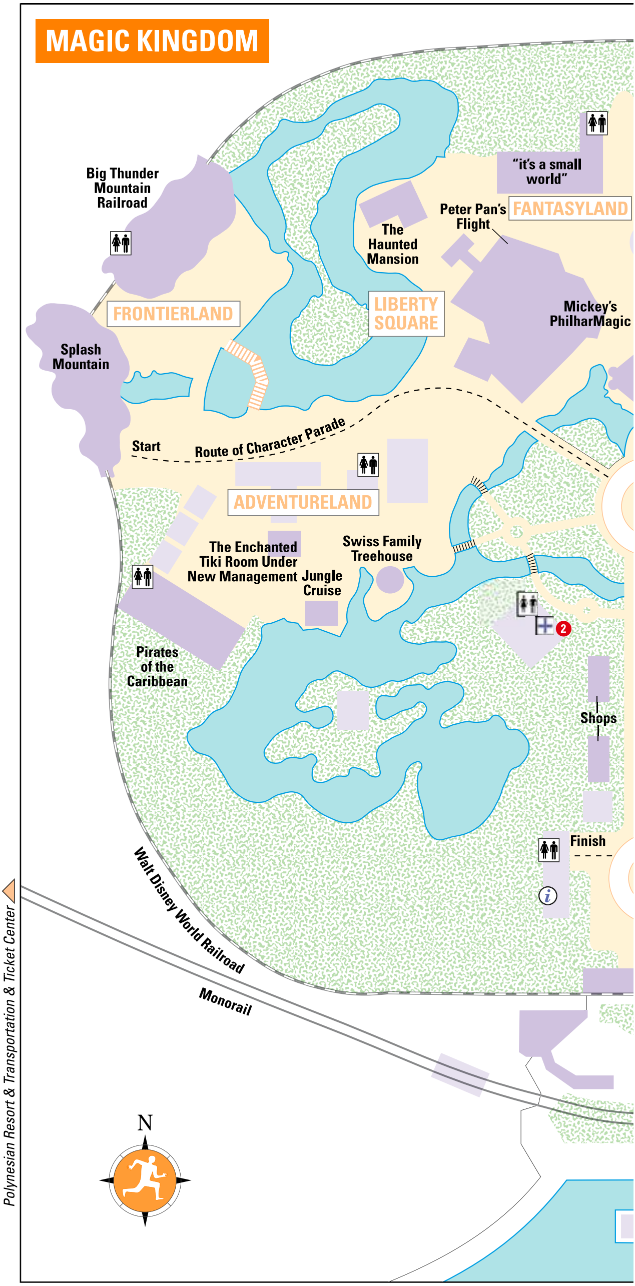
Liberty Square. The clichéd haunted house theme is treated masterfully here, with Disney crafting one of its best sets for this buggy ride through a spooky mansion inhabited by a host of Audio-Animatronics vampires, gravediggers, and other characters designed to make your blood curl. These robots, however, play a supporting role to ghosts and ghouls depicted by the clever use of holograms – at one point, they even pop up as fellow passengers in your “doom buggy.” The ride is more visually impressive than scary, and all but the most fragile of kids should be able to handle it.

Mickey’s PhilharMagic

Fantasyland. FASTPASS accepted. Feast your eyes on brilliant 3-D imagery in this animated film set to classic Disney soundtracks, featuring Daffy Duck and other

Insider tip

Note that unlike many rollercoasters, on Big Thunder Mountain Railroad the back row of seats provide the greatest thrills.


MAGIC KINGDOM
Big Thunder Mountain Railroad
FRONTIERLAND
Splash Mountain
"it's a small world"
Peter Pan's Flight
FANTASYLAND
The Haunted Mansion
LIBERTY SQUARE
Mickey's PhilharMagic
Start
Route of Character Parade
ADVENTURELAND
The Enchanted Tiki Room Under New Management
Swiss Family Treehouse
Jungle Cruise
Pirates of the Caribbean
2
Shops
Finish
i
Walt Disney World Railroad
Monorail
Polynesian Resort & Transportation & Ticket Center
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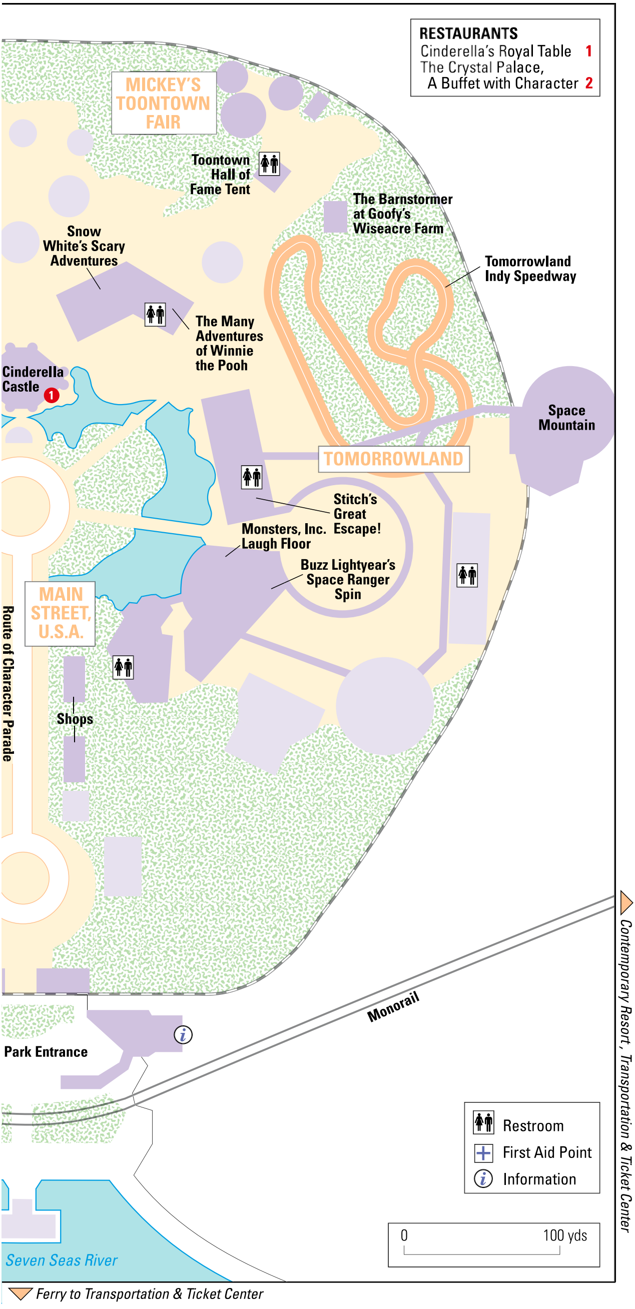

RESTAURANTS
Cinderella's Royal Table 1
The Crystal Palace, A Buffet with Character 2
MICKEY'S TOONTOWN FAIR
Toontown Hall of Fame Tent
The Barnstormer at Goofy's Wiseacre Farm
Tomorrowland Indy Speedway
Snow White's Scary Adventures
The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh
Cinderella Castle
1
Space Mountain
TOMORROWLAND
Stitch's Great Escape!
Monsters, Inc. Laugh Floor
Buzz Lightyear's Space Ranger Spin
MAIN STREET, U.S.A.
Route of Character Parade
Shops
Park Entrance
Monorail
Contemporary Resort, Transportation & Ticket Center
🚻 Restroom
➕ First Aid Point
ⓘ Information
0
100 yds
Seven Seas River
Ferry to Transportation & Ticket Center

SPACE MOUNTAIN

▲ SPACE MOUNTAIN

well-known characters. The effects, including 3-D kisses, popping champagne corks, delicious-smelling apple pie, and a memorable ride over the rooftops with Aladdin, are so enchanting that worn-out grown-ups will forget their tired feet and readily believe that carpets can fly. The combination of recognizable characters and songs, and its charming simplicity, makes this Orlando's best 3-D attraction.

Space Mountain

Tomorrowland. Minimum height: 44"/112cm. FASTPASS accepted.

Originally the ride that everyone talked about after a visit to Disney World, the grande dame of rollercoasters has stood the test of time remarkably well, primarily because everything takes place in complete darkness. The twin tracks are set entirely inside a white, spiraling concrete colossus – other than the flashes of light from passing stars and meteors, you see nothing. This heightens the element of surprise, reinforcing the fear factor at every turn and plunge, even though the smallish cars (which may be a little too cramped for taller riders) don't travel at particularly fast speeds.

Stitch's Great Escape!

Tomorrowland. Minimum height: 40"/102cm. FASTPASS accepted.

The fearsome creature of **The ExtraTERRORestrial Alien Encounter**, the attraction's former name, has been replaced by the more kid-friendly Stitch, but the concept remains the same, with the mischievous monster escaping from a cage in the middle of a theater-in-the-round. Then, in complete darkness, impressive multi-sensory effects allow an invisible Stitch to wreak havoc on the audience, bouncing on top of them and generally making a nuisance of himself. These effects, along with some of the best Audio-Animatronics to be found in Disney, are the attraction's strong points; conversely, the Stitch character just isn't scary enough to produce the type of nerve-jangling moments that made The ExtraTERRORestrial Alien Encounter such a winner.

Monsters, Inc. Laugh Floor

Tomorrowland. The Monsters have decided that collecting human laughter will make them more powerful, and have staged a comedy show for this very purpose. Their success depends largely on the audience, members of which are singled out by a roaming camera, displayed on a big screen, and either made fun of or encouraged to go along with the Monsters' juvenile jokes. Attention-seeking kids generally have a blast, but those who dread audience participation should avoid this one like the plague.

Other rides and attractions

Most of the rest of the park's rides and attractions will appeal to children much more than to adults. The park is starting to show its age in the kid-oriented Fantasyland; its spinning cups and saucers, flying elephants, and merry-go-rounds are the staple rides that you'd find in any village fairground. **Peter Pan's Flight**, **The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh** (both accepting FASTPASS), **and Snow White's Scary Adventures** are all whimsical rides through these well-known fairytales – easily missed for anyone who has reached puberty, but very popular with the youngest visitors. Lengthy waiting lines also beckon at **"it's a small world"** which, if you can put up with the endless singing of the theme song, is a pleasant boat ride around a world of multi-ethnic dolls.

Adjoining Fantasyland, Mickey's Toontown Fair is the best place in the park to meet Disney characters; all the usual suspects are present throughout the day for autographs and handshakes in the **Toontown Hall of Fame Tent**, though the only notable ride is **The Barnstormer at Goofy's Wiseacre Farm** (minimum height 35"/89cm), a relatively calm, kid-friendly rollercoaster.

The lines are always long at the **Tomorrowland Indy Speedway** (minimum height to ride alone 52"/132cm), but this go-cart ride is disappointingly tame. Also in Tomorrowland, the much-hyped **Buzz Lightyear's Space Ranger Spin** is like being inside a video game: you can spin your buggy and fire at all manner of baddies, but with no prior explanation of the rules, the excitement wanes quickly.

In Adventureland, the **Swiss Family Treehouse** is always worth a quick tour for its charming details; and **The Enchanted Tiki Room Under New Management** will have your toes tapping along to its first few Broadway-style songs performed by Audio-Animatronics tropical birds before the music becomes grating and these same toes will start itching to leave.

▼ MICKEY'S TOONTOWN FAIR

Live shows

Disney Dreams Come True Parade

Daily 3pm, begins next to Splash Mountain, ends at park entrance. The kids will never forgive you if you miss Disney's signature character parade. Formerly the Share a Dream Come True Parade, the only notable difference in this new incarnation is that the giant snow globes in which the characters were previously presented are gone. The procession still includes a panoply of Disney's favorite heroes and villains, from Cinderella to Cruella, with even humble fairies and walking broomsticks getting their moment in the spotlight. Standing near the departure point will save waiting time and allow you to get back to touring the park more quickly. It takes around twenty minutes for the complete cast of characters to pass by.

Wishes

Daily at park closing time, around Cinderella Castle. Of all the imaginative efforts to create the aura of fantasy that pervades the Magic Kingdom, this simple but stunning

▲ CINDERELLA'S ROYAL TABLE

Insider tip

Of the multitude of opportunities at Disney World to eat while characters sign autographs, pose for photos, and generally help the mediocre food go down, the character breakfasts are often the most popular. However, despite the fact that these breakfasts rarely come cheap, many people insist on arriving at opening time, wolfing down their food, staying for a couple of snapshots and an inane conversation or two with Goofy before rushing off to the parks. This means that later on in the morning things will be a lot quieter, allowing quality time with the characters and a much more rewarding experience for the kids.

twelve-minute fireworks display is the most magical of them all. The pyrotechnics are set to a musical score of classic Disney songs, which, along with the dreamy backdrop of the Castle, make this show the most likely of all the theme park closing extravaganzas to leave you with a lump in the throat. You can see the fireworks from anywhere in the park, though the best viewing points are facing the Cinderella Castle at the end of Main Street, U.S.A.

Shops

Main Street, U.S.A

This entire stretch between the park entrance and Cinderella Castle is lined with gift shops, where you can buy everything from Mickey Mouse coffee and designer watches to, of course, those ubiquitous mouse-ear monogrammed caps. The shops offer a comprehensive selection of the most sought-after merchandise, much of it overpriced and tacky but still an inevitable draw.

Restaurants

Cinderella's Royal Table

Cinderella Castle. Cinderella and a posse of princesses are present as you dine on decent prime rib, lamb chops, and other meaty dishes for lunch ($35.99) and dinner ($40.99), or a sausage-bacon-and-eggs breakfast ($32.99), in the Castle's grand dining room with high ceilings and stained-glass windows. It's an expensive treat that appeals especially to families, although the kudos that Disney fanatics attach to being able to eat in the Castle makes this place very popular with childless adults as well. Consequently, you should reserve six months in advance by calling ☎407/939-3463.

The Crystal Palace, A Buffet with Character

Off Main Street, U.S.A. Hectic, brightly lit, turn-of-the-twentieth-century-themed dining room, patrolled by Winnie the Pooh and friends, where the unspectacular but filling breakfast ($18.99), lunch ($20.99), and dinner ($28.99) buffets are kept fresh by chefs constantly preparing new food, including BBQ chicken, carved ham, plenty of salads, and sticky desserts. It may seem a little overpriced, but there are always plenty of characters milling about and you'll never want for a photo opportunity, which is, after all, a large part of the fun of character dining. Reservations are not required, but can be made by calling ☎407/939-3463.

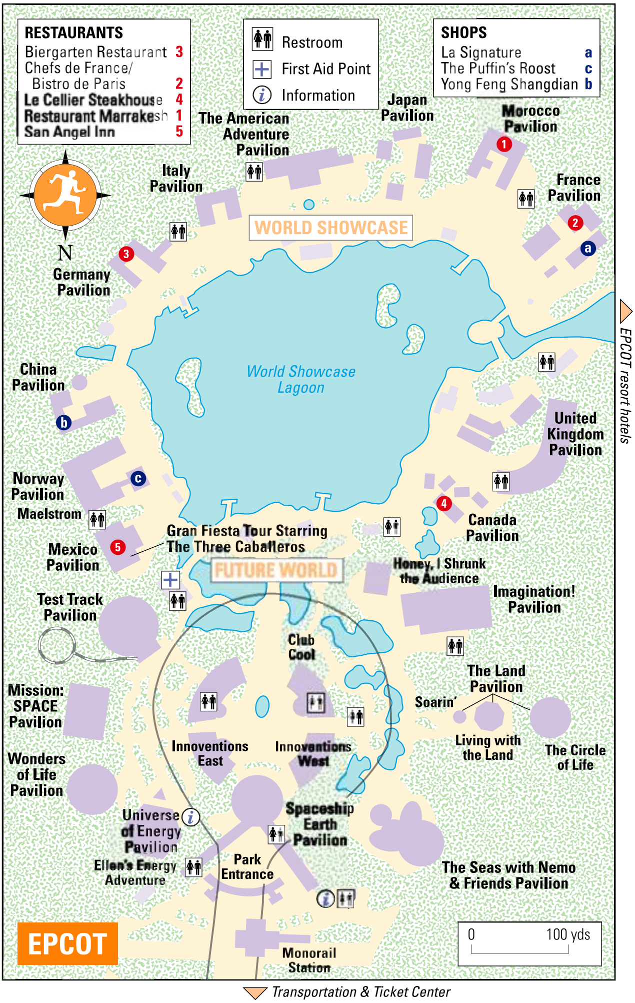
EPCOT

The Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow, better known as EPCOT, opened in 1982. The idea was conceived in the 1960s, when Walt Disney envisioned it as a real community engaging in cutting-edge experiments and developing new technologies, although the end result was a rather less ambitious general celebration of human achievement. Covering an energy-sapping 300 acres, the park is divided into two areas. Future World consists of several pavilions vaunting mankind's progress in areas such as communications, agriculture, and science, with many of the exhibits striving to educate as much as entertain (which can sometimes bore the littler ones). The picturesque World Showcase, with its cultural film presentations, ethnic restaurants, and striking replicas of famous world landmarks built around a large lagoon, is the most extensive tribute to foreign cultures on offer in Orlando. Because of EPCOT's considerable size, the crowds are absorbed well and strolling about tends to be less stressful than at the other Disney parks.

Spaceship Earth

Spaceship Earth Pavilion. The Spaceship Earth Pavilion is housed in the imposing geosphere that serves as EPCOT's signature landmark. Named for a phrase coined by its inventor, futurist Buckminster Fuller, the geodesic dome encompasses more space without internal supports than any other enclosure – and is perhaps the most eloquent realization of Fuller's "more for less" architectural dictum. The attraction inside the geosphere was closed for extensive renovations at the time of writing. The new and improved ride will still have a time-travel

▼ GEOSPHERE AT SPACESHIP EARTH


RESTAURANTS
Biergarten Restaurant 3
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The Puffin's Roost c
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N
Japan Pavilion
Morocco Pavilion
The American Adventure Pavilion
Italy Pavilion
France Pavilion
WORLD SHOWCASE
Germany Pavilion
China Pavilion
World Showcase Lagoon
United Kingdom Pavilion
Norway Pavilion
Maelstrom
Canada Pavilion
Mexico Pavilion
Gran Fiesta Tour Starring The Three Caballeros
FUTURE WORLD
Honey, I Shrunk the Audience
Imagination! Pavilion
Test Track Pavilion
Club Cool
The Land Pavilion
Soarin'
Mission: SPACE Pavilion
Innoventions East
Innoventions West
Living with the Land
The Circle of Life
Wonders of Life Pavilion
Universe of Energy Pavilion
Spaceship Earth Pavilion
Ellen's Energy Adventure
Park Entrance
The Seas with Nemo & Friends Pavilion
EPCOT
Monorail Station
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EPCOT resort hotels
Transportation & Ticket Center

theme, with the focus more on mankind's plans for the future than on the previous subject of the way we communicate with one another. The poignant finale, which has you ascending into the star-filled core of the geosphere, will also remain – a good thing, since this was the best moment of the original ride. Expect to see new sets, costumes, lighting, music, and interactive features when the revamped ride opens in early 2008.

Ellen's Energy Adventure

Universe of Energy Pavilion.

Comedian Ellen de Generes tries her best to explain the world's energy sources in as nonscientific and fun a way as

MISSION SPACE
Presented by
hp

▲ MISSION: SPACE

possible, but despite some good cinematography on enormous screens, there's only so much entertainment value in oil pumps, coal mines, and natural gas plants. Dinosaurs – however tenuous their link in the fossil fuel chain – are much more fun, and a buggy ride through a primeval forest inhabited by realistic Audio-Animatronics dinosaurs is the highlight.

Mission: SPACE

Mission: SPACE Pavilion. Minimum height: 44"/112cm. FASTPASS accepted. This attempt to turn you into an astronaut on a voyage to Mars was evidently a bit too realistic for some, and now the ride offers two levels of intensity: join the Orange Team for the original experience or the Green Team for a gentler ride which eradicates the spinning movements that tend to cause nausea (a good choice just after lunch). Whichever team you decide to join, you'll be given one of four roles to play during the voyage – pilot, navigator, engineer, or commander – which basically involves pushing a few buttons when prompted to do so. The capsule is compact and the computer-generated graphics that are played on a screen a few inches from your face are based on actual data from satellites that have orbited Mars. It's all good fun, although it must be said that the best moments of the ride are experienced only on the Orange Team, where

For park hours, prices, and FASTPASS information, see "Theme park practicalities" in Essentials.

Insider tip

Upon entering the park, the inclination of EPCOT first-timers is to check out what's going on in the golfball-like geosphere. Go instead directly to the popular Mission: SPACE or Soarin' and obtain a FASTPASS for one and join the line (which should be short enough if you arrive early) for the other. While you're waiting, think of a decent excuse to ditch your companions so that you can get on Test Track with little or no wait via the single-rider line. This tactic should enable you to experience the park's three main draws in about an hour or so. Note also that the Innoventions Pavilion, by far the park's least interesting area, enjoys a prime location at the center of Future World, so don't waste time here until you've finished with everything else.

Insider tip

Mission: SPACE is one of Orlando's most gut-wrenching flight-simulator rides, but all attractions using this type of technology have the potential to make you want to throw up. The single best way to avoid an embarrassing and messy moment is to keep focused on whatever is playing on the screen in front of you.

cutting-edge flight-simulator technology creates real G-force on take-off and during a "slingshot" around the Moon.

Test Track

Test Track Pavilion. Minimum height: 40"/102cm. FASTPASS accepted. Single-rider line available. The park's only rollercoaster-style ride promises plenty of high-speed excitement, but delivers disappointingly little in the way of thrills and spills. It gets too bogged down by its high-performance-car-testing theme, which can seem overly technical for a thrill ride. You board your test vehicle and undergo a series of tests to see how the car performs in different situations. The net result is a mild-mannered sequence of bumps, jerks and jolts reminiscent of those unhappy days as a learner-driver, and only the last thirty seconds or so, when the speed tests are carried out, are really exciting. On the plus side, this is one of the longest rides in Disney, lasting for more than five minutes.

Honey, I Shrunk the Audience

Imagination! Pavilion. FASTPASS accepted. This engaging 3-D presentation coordinates impressive visuals with low-tech "feelies"– which add sensations of touch and smell – to give an audience "shrunk" by an inventor's Shrinking Gun plenty of amusing surprises, including being gently teased by white mice and a giant dog. The idea is similar to It's Tough to be a Bug! (see p.75) at Disney's Animal Kingdom, the main difference here being the absence of any moments liable to really scare the kids.

Soarin'

The Land Pavilion. Minimum height: 40"/102cm. FASTPASS accepted. Replicated from Disneyland in California, this is currently the

▼ SOARIN'

▲ THE SEAS WITH NEMO & FRIENDS AQUARIUM

park's most popular attraction – and deservedly so. In un-Disney-like fashion, there are no themes, props, or protracted build-ups here; and this simplicity proves to be the ride's greatest charm. You're basically watching an IMAX movie in seats suspended in mid air and positioned much closer to the enormous screen than you'd get in a conventional theater. The seats' subtle movements synchronize with the changing Californian landscapes passing across the screen, giving the impression that you're "flying" over them in a hang glider. A rousing musical score adds to the dreamy nature of this ride, but is unfortunately not quite loud enough to drown out the occasional kid's scream, which has the unfortunate effect of jolting one back to reality. If you have feisty offspring, choose which adult gets to babysit and which gets to enjoy the ride.

Living with the Land

The Land Pavilion. FASTPASS accepted. An entertaining and informative fourteen-minute boat ride through several greenhouses showcasing farming techniques from around the world, from crop growing in the tropics to fish farming. The focus on food production gives Disney researchers the opportunity to proudly display their Mickey Mouse–shaped cucumbers, watermelons, and pumpkins, while the ride's commentary plugs the fact that the Land Pavilion's restaurant serves EPCOT-grown veggies.

The Circle of Life

The Land Pavilion. In this amusing animated fable, Simba and other characters from *The Lion King* succeed in explaining to a younger audience the need for protecting the environment much better than Al Gore could ever hope to do. However, the conclusion, suggesting that mankind is well on top of the problem, reeks of Disney's obsession with achieving a happy ending no matter what.

The Seas with Nemo & Friends

The Seas with Nemo & Friends Pavilion. The park's newest ride is a bit of a disappointment. It's based on the *Finding Nemo* films and takes you on a terrestrial buggy ride through an aquatic world full of talking fish. There are some nifty moments, notably when the ride's characters appear to be swimming with the real fish that inhabit the Pavilion's giant aquarium (see below). But there are also some suspect props, such as jellyfish that look like mosquito nets hanging from all too visible wires, that detract from the feeling of being underwater.

The Seas with Nemo & Friends aquarium

The Seas with Nemo & Friends Pavilion. The entire EPCOT geosphere could fit into this massive saltwater aquarium spread over two floors, where a coral reef supports more than two thousand fish. The sharks, dolphins, turtles, rays, and multitude of tropical fish are best viewed at feeding times (10am, 1pm & 3.30pm); or else you can fork out $140 to dive amongst them yourself (certified divers only; for reservations, call ☎407/939-8687).

Innoventions

Innoventions Pavilion. This pavilion is divided into two sections: Innoventions East is for the young and old; Innoventions West is geared primarily for the kids. Both are full of the latest in gizmos and gadgetry, much of which you can fiddle and play with. You can, for example, design and build a plastic robot at East's Fantastic Plastics Works, or give your kids a crash course in fire safety at West's Where's the Fire? It must be said, however, that the offerings are disappointingly mundane, and this part of the park merits only a cursory look. On the plus side, the exhibits do change from time to time, so Disney regulars on the look out for new fodder will want to give this place the once over.

World Showcase

Open from 11am. When EPCOT was in its developmental stages, eleven countries took up Disney's invitation to showcase their history, culture, architecture, and people; France built a replica Eiffel Tower in their pavilion, Mexico a Mayan pyramid, and the United Kingdom a pub, all around a forty-acre lagoon adjoining Future World. People from the participating countries arrived to staff the restaurants and gift shops, adapting to the never-ending smiles and over-exuberance generally expected of Disney's "cast members."

Insider tip

Freebies at Disney World are about as rare as talking mice, but at Club Cool the Coca-Cola Company treats you to liquid refreshments from around the world. You can guzzle free samples of fizzy oddities such as the surprisingly tasty Vegita Beta (a Japanese vitamin drink), Mozambican ginger beer, and other sugary drinks that ironically have been driven to the brink of extinction by the omnipotence of Coca-Cola. The attraction is unmarked and undescribed on the park's official map; it's on your right when leaving Future World for World Showcase, next to Innoventions West.

▲ MOROCCO PAVILION

Indeed, the more low-key atmosphere of World Showcase is part of its appeal. It's also by far the most attractive area of the park, best enjoyed by strolling leisurely around the lagoon from one pavilion to the next – the eclectic collection of buildings with their waterfront setting form a picturesque ensemble, and plenty of lively street entertainment provides a good counter-balance to the somewhat staid atmosphere of Future World. You can also eat more exotically here than at any other theme park, and shop for things other than stuffed toys and mouse ears.

Boats cross the lagoon at regular intervals throughout the day, linking the entrance with the German and Moroccan pavilions.

The American Adventure

The American Adventure Pavilion.

Of the few formal attractions found at World Showcase, it comes as little surprise that the most high-profile one takes place at the flagship **The American Adventure Pavilion**, which faces Future World and the geosphere from across the lagoon. Inside, a patriotic 30-minute account of American history, fronted by Audio-Animatronics versions of Benjamin Franklin and Mark Twain, describes the major events in this nation's 200-plus years using a combination of film footage and special effects.

Other pavilions

Be sure not to miss the excellent film presentations in the **Chinese** and **French pavilions**, giving a mouth-watering resume of these countries' treasures; they'll have you racing to the nearest travel agent. A similar film on **Canada** is also impressive, if a touch monotonous. **Mexico** touts its attractions in a more kid-friendly way in Gran Fiesta Tour Starring The Three Caballeros, a boat ride in which characters from the vintage Disney movie *The Three Caballeros* appear in film footage of typical Mexican scenes; you won't find a better vignette of what World Showcase is all about than Donald Duck performing an Acapulco high-dive. Elsewhere, **Norway** tries to make the most of its Viking past in Maelstrom (FASTPASS accepted), but fails to capitalize on the juicy material, instead delivering a bland boat trip that's only worth it if there's no line.

▲ THE PUFFIN'S ROOST

Live shows

Illuminations: Reflections of Earth

Daily at park closing time. EPCOT's closing extravaganza takes place on World Showcase Lagoon, which, for thirteen breathtaking minutes, is made resplendent by fire, fireworks, and fountains, while video screens on a huge globe show moving images in keeping with the park's human achievement motif. Anywhere around the lagoon will provide a good vantage point, but if you want to be in the front rows, it's best to arrive about thirty minutes before showtime.

Shops

La Signature

World Showcase, France. One of two locations in the world where you can find one-of-a-kind Guerlain fragrances, make-up, and the like.

The Puffin's Roost

World Showcase, Norway. Head past the pungent Norwegian perfume and plastic Viking helmets straight to the quality sweaters and Helly Hansen coats.

Yong Feng Shangdian

World Showcase, China. The most elaborate shop in the Disney theme parks catches the eye with its beautiful jade statues – but they also stock everything from porcelain dolls to fortune cookies.

Restaurants

Biergarten Restaurant

World Showcase, Germany. All the sauerkraut, schnitzel, and sausages you can eat at this hearty Oktoberfest-inspired buffet ($19.99 lunch, $26.99 dinner) that's a good choice on colder days when the stomach requires a more substantial lining. Despite the beer-festival theme, all beverages, alcoholic or otherwise, cost extra.

Chefs de France/Bistro de Paris

World Showcase, France. Overseen by renowned French chefs Paul Bocuse, Gaston Le Nôtre, and Roger Vergé, the food (some of which is flown in daily from France) and accompanying

▼ CHEFS DE FRANCE/BISTRO DE PARIS

▲ SAN ANGEL INN

wine list are both top-notch. The authenticity of the cuisine, which includes foie gras, goat's cheese salad, snails, and other French favorites, is not matched by the waiters, who are considerably more cheerful than their Parisian counterparts. Entrees at the less formal *Chefs de France* are $25–30; at the *Bistro de Paris* upstairs they are $30 and up.

Le Cellier Steakhouse

World Showcase, Canada. While not one of the world's most identifiable cuisines, the Canadians do have tremendous cuts of beef, some decent ales and beers, and maple syrup – which features here in a salmon entree and the crème brûlée dessert. Well-prepared steaks ($20–30) dominate the menu and are the main reason why this is one of EPCOT's most popular restaurants. Reservations recommended; call ☎407/939-3463.

Restaurant Marrakesh

World Showcase, Morocco. The flavorful Moroccan menu includes *couscous* (from $19.95) and *meshoui* – lamb roasted with vegetables – ($26.95), with belly-dancers providing the entertainment.

San Angel Inn

World Showcase, Mexico. World Showcase's most atmospheric restaurant gives you the opportunity to eat under the stars on a balmy night in a picturesque Mexican village. It's often too dark to see what you're eating, which is a shame, since several dishes are more adventurous than the standard Tex-Mex fare, using ingredients such as cocoa and cactus. The dim lighting, however, has no effect on the audibility of the roaming mariachi band, which can be grating if you're not in the right mood. The adjoining crafts market adds to the authentic setting. Lunch entrees $12–19; dinner $20–28.

Disney's Hollywood Studios

After signing an agreement in the 1980s with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) to exploit MGM's many movie classics, Disney had an ample source of instantly recognizable images to mold into rides suitable for all ages. The park opened in 1989 as Disney-MGM Studios, but since then, the addition of attractions encompassing music, television, and theater led to the decision to rename the park Disney's Hollywood Studios to reflect the broader focus on "entertainment." Of the four main Disney parks, it's the easiest to visit in a day. The attractions – which include an excellent thrill ride on par with those at Universal's Islands of Adventure, and several entertaining live shows – lie along streets styled after Hollywood film sets, sprouting off from a central square dominated by a giant replica of Mickey Mouse's sorcerer's hat from the film Fantasia. The park also doubles as a working production studio, churning out some of Disney's latest film offerings.

For park hours, prices, and FASTPASS information, see "Theme park practicalities" in Essentials.

The Disney's Hollywood Studios Backlot Tour

Mickey Ave. Lasting a lengthy 35 minutes, this tour of a working production studio has its high and low points. Watching people beaver away on new costumes and scenery is a potentially interesting part of the tour, but you only see them from behind a glass partition, without getting any real insight into what they are doing. Moving outside, film props from *Star Wars* and other well-known movies are fun to see – and this part of the attraction is kept relevant by the regular addition of props from recent MGM and Disney productions. The undoubted highlight comes at the end when you arrive at the Catastrophe Canyon movie set to witness a flash-flood brought to life in quite a disturbing way by fireballs and other great effects.

Insider tip

The Disney's Hollywood Studios Backlot Tour is best avoided an hour or so before the Lights, Motors, Action! Extreme Stunt Show. The noise of the cars warming up will drown out the tour guide's commentary as you drive past the movie props.

▲ LONDON AND SAN FRANCISCO FILM SETS

Walt Disney: One Man's Dream

Mickey Ave. A somewhat understated attraction which, through museum-style exhibits and a 25-minute documentary film, gives a surprisingly sober account – free from the adulation that you might have expected – of how this son of a Missouri farmer made good.

The Great Movie Ride

Mickey Ave. Movie buffs will enjoy this nostalgic ride through sets from several classic films, from *Public Enemy*'s Gangster Alley to *The Wizard of Oz*'s Yellow Brick Road. The attraction is given a welcome additional dimension by real-life actors who interact with the Audio-Animatronics movie stars. The sketches vary from amusing re-enactments of famous movie moments with a generous dose of slapstick comedy to performances so bad that you'll have trouble distinguishing the actors from the robots. All in all, however, the attraction is good enough to hold the audience's attention from start to finish.

Rock 'n' Roller Coaster

Off Sunset Blvd. Minimum height: 48"/122cm. FASTPASS accepted. Board your VIP limousine for a high-speed trip to an Aerosmith concert. The band's high-energy music accompanies you throughout the ride and, like it or not, certainly helps keep the adrenaline pumping (if anything, it would benefit from being turned up a little louder). Indeed, if it weren't for the music, the several

Insider tip

Arriving at the park bang on opening time pays dividends if you want to experience the two thrill rides in good time. Go directly to Rock 'n' Roller Coaster and The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror (which are conveniently located next to one another) and obtain a FASTPASS for one and join the line for the other. Since The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror can make you feel a bit sick, it's probably best to go on Rock 'n' Roller Coaster first to give your breakfast a chance to go down. A good time for a second ride later in the day on either of these attractions would be during the Lights, Motors, Action! Extreme Stunt Show, which can take as many as 5000 people out of circulation for around 30 minutes.

loop-the-loops that take place in complete darkness, and especially the break-neck speed with which the rollercoaster starts, this would be a rather ordinary ride – it's inferior to the park's other thrill ride, The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror, and there are one or two better rollercoasters elsewhere in Orlando.

The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror

End of Sunset Blvd. Minimum height: 40"/102cm. FASTPASS accepted. If Rock 'n' Roller Coaster doesn't quite live up to the hype, this excellent attraction certainly does, expertly marrying its theme and its fear factor better than any other thrill ride in Orlando. While you wait to board a mysterious service elevator in the creepy thirteen-story Hollywood Tower Hotel that goes directly to the Twilight Zone, the ride attendants, dressed in 1930s bell-hop uniforms, seem to find sinister half-smiles much easier to produce than the fake Disney grins usually required of them. The sense of foreboding continues once you're strapped into your seats in the elevator and, instead of moving up or down, you get wheeled past holograms depicting ghostly apparitions, blasts of cold air, and plenty of ominous music. When your journey through The Fifth Dimension begins in earnest, you'll experience several sudden drops – including moments of weightlessness – on one of four, randomly selected sequences, so no matter how many times you ride this one, you'll never quite know what's coming next.

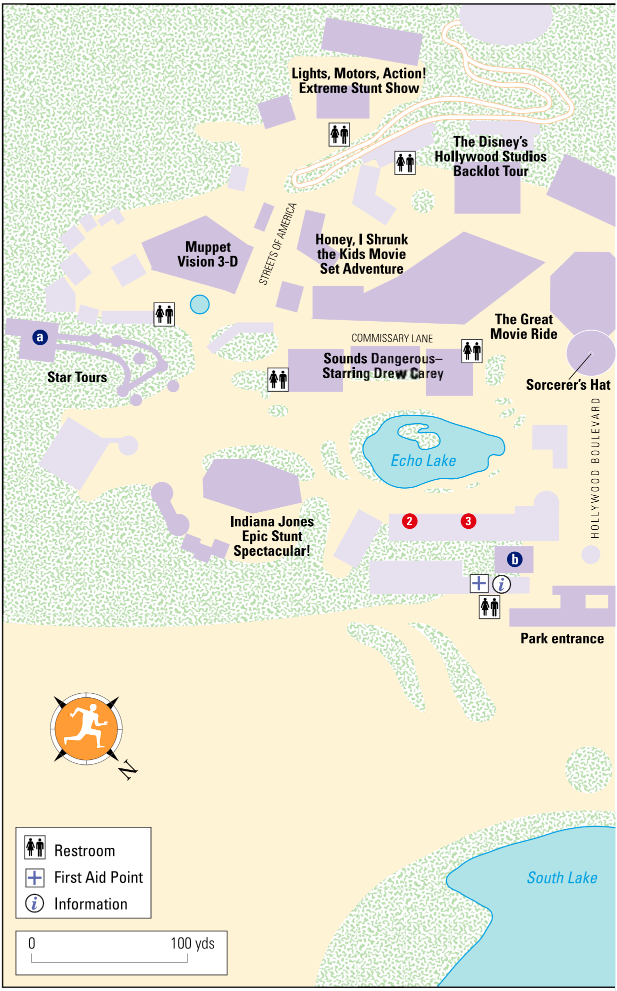
▼ THE GREAT MOVIE RIDE

The HOLLYWOOD TOWER Hotel

▲ THE TWILIGHT ZONE TOWER OF TERROR

Star Tours

End of Streets of America. Minimum height: 40"/102cm. FASTPASS accepted. You'll ride to the Moon of Endor on this *Star Wars*-based flight simulator, but the screen is too small and far away from the seating area to fully convince you that your "StarSpeeder" is weaving its way through an asteroid storm and engaging in space battles. The lasting impression, then, is of simply being bumped around in a box, proving that public transportation in outer space is no less nauseating than its equivalent in this world. The seats in the front row bring you as close as possible to the screen


Lights, Motors, Action! Extreme Stunt Show
The Disney's Hollywood Studios Backlot Tour
STREETS OF AMERICA
Muppet Vision 3-D
Honey, I Shrunk the Kids Movie Set Adventure
The Great Movie Ride
COMMISSARY LANE
a
Star Tours
Sounds Dangerous– Starring Drew Carey
Sorcerer's Hat
HOLLYWOOD BOULEVARD
Echo Lake
Indiana Jones Epic Stunt Spectacular!
2
3
b
Park entrance
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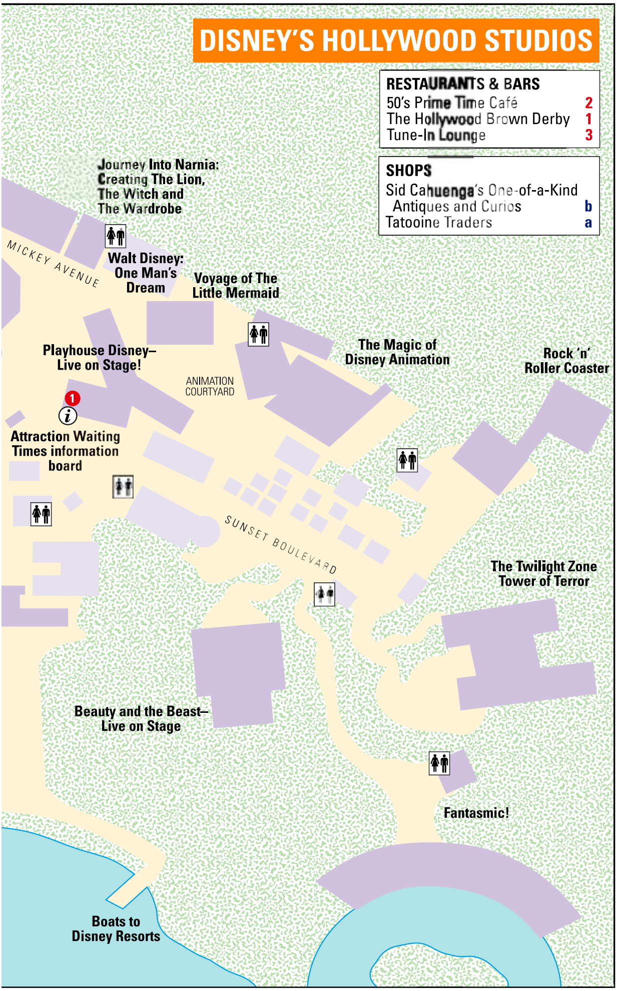
Restroom
First Aid Point
Information
0
100 yds
South Lake

and are where you'll feel the least motion sickness.

Muppet Vision 3-D

Streets of America. The humor of The Muppets – which here will appeal as much to adults as to children – and some fine 3-D effects, such as those accompanying Miss Piggy's song and Sam the Eagle's fireworks display, combine to make this one of the park's most entertaining attractions. The show takes place in a theater, complete with Audio-Animatronics versions of Statler and Waldorf, the two old hecklers cracking cheesy jokes from their box, and is full of the chaotic comedy that one would expect from Kermit and company.


DISNEY'S HOLLYWOOD STUDIOS
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SHOPS
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Tatooine Traders a
Journey Into Narnia: Creating The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe
MICKEY AVENUE
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Other rides and attractions

Both **Honey, I Shrunk the Kids Movie Set Adventure** and **Playhouse Disney – Live on Stage!** are strictly for the kids, with grown-ups relegated to sitting on the floor while their offspring clamber around a giant forest playground in the former attraction, or jig up and down with hyperactive Disney characters in the latter. Also appealing mainly to children, **The Magic of Disney Animation** teaches how to draw cute mice and ducks. During the short talk beforehand a lecturer interacts cleverly with an animated version of Mushu, the small dragon from *Mulan*, revealing how a Disney character is

▲ MUPPET VISION 3-D

thought up in the first place and thereby providing the most memorable moment for adults. Over half of **Sounds Dangerous – Starring Drew Carey** takes place in complete darkness, relying on sound effects, transmitted through poor-quality earphones, to tell a slapstick detective story. Carey plays an undercover cop on a mission to bust a smuggling operation – the result is about as interesting as listening to a play on the radio. And finally, **Journey Into Narnia: Creating The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe** blatantly promotes the Disney-produced *The Chronicles of Narnia* movies, and involves little more than watching an extended trailer for the next film in the series (which will probably be *Prince Caspian* by the time you read this).

Live shows

Indiana Jones Epic Stunt Spectacular!

Next to Echo Lake. This grand presentation of scenes from the Indiana Jones movies is one of the best live shows at Disney. The stunts, which include plenty of fist-fighting, jumping from high buildings, and exploding vehicles, are very similar to those that helped make the films so popular, while some light-hearted audience participation provides just the right amount of humor. The climax of the show is a realistic and enthralling showdown between Indy and the bad guys on a moving airplane.

Lights, Motors, Action! Extreme Stunt Show

Streets of America. The park's new big-ticket attraction, brought over from Disneyland Paris, is a high-speed and very noisy stunt show involving cars, motorbikes, and even jet-skis. Plenty of spins, jumps, and well-choreographed chases will keep everyone interested for the first ten minutes or so, but after that, those with no passion for cars might find their attention wandering to the show's picturesque backdrop of a French village. All things considered, Indiana Jones Epic Stunt Spectacular! is the more enjoyable show.

Beauty and the Beast – Live on Stage

Sunset Blvd. This abridged stage version of the famous love story has some reasonable acting (for Disney shows, that is), slick choreography, and superb costumes and sets.

Voyage of The Little Mermaid

Animation Courtyard. FASTPASS accepted. Colorful costumes and good sets are not quite sufficient to make the live performance of this nautical fairytale convincing (like other aquatic-themed attractions, such as the new *Finding Nemo* ride and show at EPCOT and Disney's Animal Kingdom respectively, the challenge of making the audience feel as if they are underwater is a stiff one – even for Disney). The use of clips from the film and sensory effects such as salty air, mist, and wind help only a little.

Fantasmic!

Daily at park closing time. Off Sunset Blvd. This dramatic show featuring lasers, lights, and a few fireworks thrown in for good measure takes place in Mickey's dreams, which provide sufficient license for the appearance of just about every Disney character ever created. Get there an hour early if you want a seat.

Shops

Sid Cahuenga's One-of-a-Kind Antiques and Curios

On the left just after the park entrance. Specializing in movie posters and one-of-a-kind signed photos of stars from the big and small screens at not-so-kind prices.

Tatooine Traders

At the Star Tours exit. Fans of the *Star Wars* films will enjoy browsing through the memorabilia, which, along with the usual T-shirts and plastic toys, includes signed photographs and limited edition Lightsabres costing hundreds of dollars.

▼ LIGHTS, MOTORS, ACTION! EXTREME STUNT SHOW

▲ 50'S PRIME TIME CAFÉ

Restaurants

50's Prime Time Café

Opposite Echo Lake. Based on a kitchen in a 1950s all-American home, with plenty of communal tables but very few tables-for-two, this hectic restaurant is the ideal place to fill your kids up on decent meatloaf, fried chicken, pot roast, and other comfort food, for $13–16 at lunch or $15–20 at dinner.

The Hollywood Brown Derby

Opposite the sorcerer's hat. The large, softly lit, carpeted dining room sets a refined tone, where, despite the hordes of strollers parked outside, you can eat the park's best lunches ($15–25) and dinners ($22–32) in relative peace and quiet. The menu features excellent lamb, beef, salmon, and tuna, with a few salad options at lunch.

Bars

Tune-In Lounge

Opposite Echo Lake. Adjoining the *50's Prime Time Café*, this is one of the very rare places at the Disney theme parks where you can buy alcohol. It's invariably packed with stressed parents calming their nerves, so you'll have to fight to get one of the several comfy chairs that fill the bar.

Disney's Animal Kingdom

Disney's largest theme park, covering more than five hundred acres, is in many ways its greatest achievement to date. Florida's swampland has been transformed miraculously into the Asia and Africa of your most fanciful dreams, and at no point while touring the park do you ever feel like you're in a zoo – which is essentially what this is. The park is divided into six "lands," five of which are arranged around The Tree of Life, the signature landmark that rises over the first "land," Discovery Island, which sits in the center of the park and is linked to the other lands by bridges. Working in a clockwise direction around Discovery Island: Camp Minnie-Mickey resembles a summer camp in the Adirondacks; Africa and Asia are fabulous re-creations of the natural landscapes and exotic flavors of these continents; Rafiki's Planet Watch educates visitors in nature conservation; and DinoLand U.S.A. is dedicated to dinosaurs.

Oasis and The Tree of Life

Upon entering the park all visitors pass through the Oasis, a verdant tropical garden inhabited by flamingos and other exotic animals, before crossing a bridge to Discovery Island. Here you'll find the park's superbly devised icon, The Tree of Life, a 145-foot concrete tree whose trunk and branches have been skillfully engraved with 325 cleverly intertwined images of all kinds of animals; look for the tortoises and kangaroos carved onto the tree's base.

It's Tough to be a Bug!

The Tree of Life. Deep down in the root system of The Tree of Life (the wait in line allows you to admire the Tree's intricate engravings) a multitude of bugs are waiting to show you what an insect's life is really like. The audience of "honorary bugs" is given a fun and light-hearted 3-D demonstration that reveals the survival techniques of various creepy-crawlies, and involves having poisonous darts, acidic sprays, and foul-smelling gases shot at you, all brought to life by diverse "feelies" and captivating 3-D visuals. Then the show's mood changes, becoming much darker as a malevolent grasshopper attempts to exterminate the audience by way of giant fly-swatters and cans of "Bug Doom" insect spray. This unexpectedly

> For park hours, prices, and FASTPASS information, see "Theme park practicalities" in Essentials.

▲ IT'S TOUGH TO BE A BUG!

twisted moment is the highlight, although it can be intimidating for younger children.

Kilimanjaro Safaris

Africa. FASTPASS accepted. In this very successful attempt to re-create a real safari through the African savannah, giraffes, elephants, hippos, and rhinos all roam free; you'll also catch a glimpse of lions, though they tend to spend most of the daytime hours asleep. The tour is conducted in a large, open-side safari-style vehicle with commentary from the driver, who points out the animals while at the same time helping other park rangers track down make-believe poachers – an entertaining subplot that doesn't distract at all from the wildlife observation. You traverse the savannah at a steady pace, maximizing your chances of getting a good look at the animals and making photography easier, although all sightings are from a great enough distance to make a decent zoom lens worth having.

Pangani Forest Exploration Trail

Africa. Playful gorillas are the star attraction on this pleasant nature trail showcasing African wildlife, where you'll see animals that differ slightly from the normal zoo contingent, such as the Colobus monkey with its long bushy white tail and the giraffe-like okapi. You can observe most of the animals relatively up-close from the trail that winds through lush, jungle-like vegetation. Your first encounter with the gorillas is through a glass screen, but a little further on, as you cross a suspension bridge, you're rewarded with a better, open-air view of them. Another good photo opportunity comes at the hippo pool, where you may be surprised by how gracefully these creatures move underwater.

Rafiki's Planet Watch

East of Africa and north of Asia. Accessible only by taking the **Wildlife Express Train** from Africa – a 10-minute ride that passes the park's animal care facilities – this is the most openly educational section of the park. In **Conservation**

Insider tip

Remember that Disney's Animal Kingdom is a glorified zoo and as such the animals are all highly conditioned. The nearer the park gets to closing time, the nearer the animals are to dinner. So just as a dog gets excited before feeding time, the park's animals tend to become more active as the day progresses, which makes mid-afternoon a good time to visit the park's two nature trails or go on Kilimanjaro Safaris.

▲ PANGANI FOREST EXPLORATION TRAIL

Station, interactive exhibits promote nature conservation – although the constant reminders of what a good job Disney is doing in this respect verge on overkill. Be sure not to miss the simple yet incredibly touching **Song of the Rainforest**, where the sounds of the rainforest – from screeching birds to buzzing chainsaws – come alive as you sit with earphones in a darkened booth (close your eyes to maximize concentration on the sounds). Also worth a look are the **"animal cams"** positioned along the park's two nature trails and inside the buildings where the animals are housed, which voyeurs can control by pushing arrows on a TV screen. Once you're tired of spying on the animals, get out and touch them at the adjacent **Affection Section** petting zoo – the stroking is limited to docile sheep and goats, but the kids will love it.

Kali River Rapids

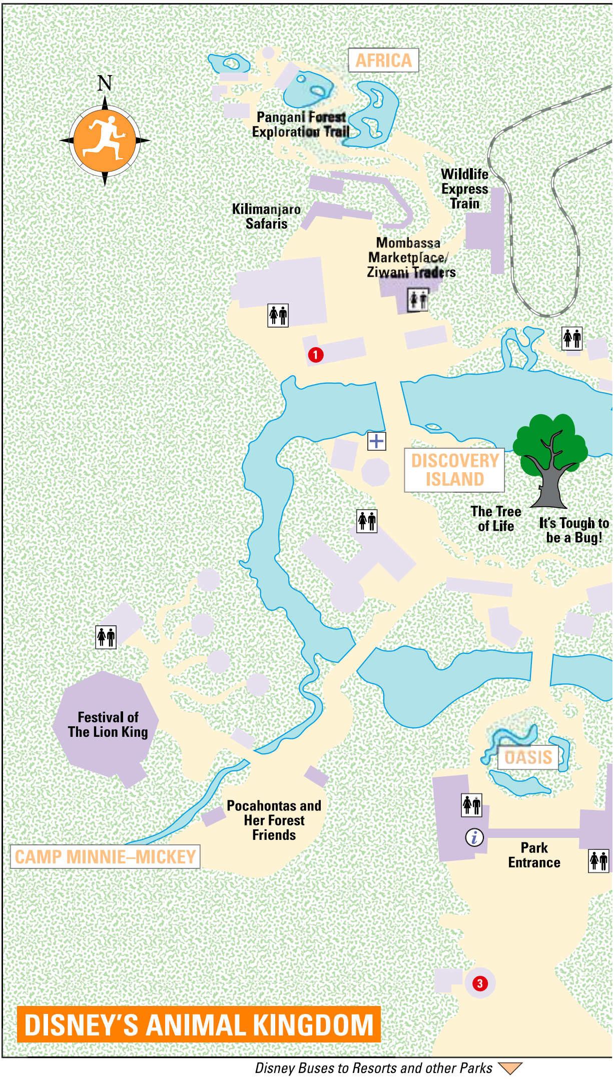
Asia. Minimum height: 38"/97cm. FASTPASS accepted. The emphasis is very much on getting wet as you board a twelve-person raft for a swirling trip down the Chakrandi River. As with most water-based rides at Disney, the saturation far outweighs the excitement – except for young kids, for whom the saturation *is* the excitement. Since the raft spins in all directions during the ride, there's no particular position on board that will keep you drier than anywhere else.

Maharajah Jungle Trek

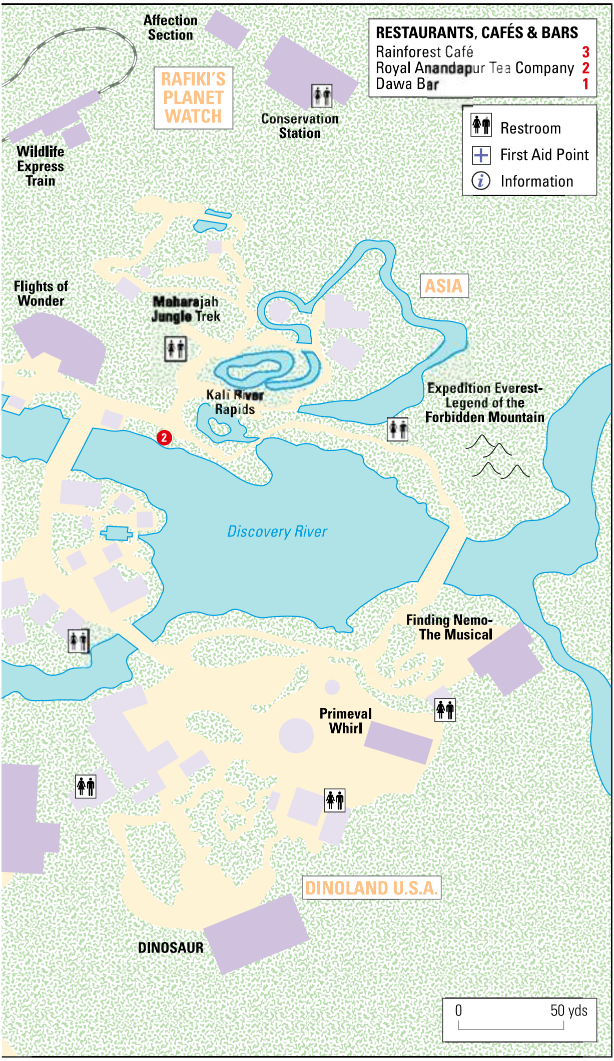
Asia. Although still good for a wander, the Asian-animal equivalent of Africa's Pangani Forest Exploration Trail is slightly less interesting than its counterpart, mainly because most of the animals aren't particularly active in front of crowds. The magnificent tigers, the trail's outstanding feature, lounge around the ruins of an ancient palace, looking very serene and well fed, while the Komodo dragons and fruit bats almost never move at all. You do at least get relatively up-close views of the wildlife.

Expedition Everest – Legend of the Forbidden Mountain

Asia. Minimum height 44"/112cm. FASTPASS accepted. This


N
AFRICA
Pangani Forest Exploration Trail
Wildlife Express Train
Kilimanjaro Safaris
Mombassa Marketplace/ Ziwani Traders
1
DISCOVERY ISLAND
The Tree of Life
It's Tough to be a Bug!
Festival of The Lion King
OASIS
Pocahontas and Her Forest Friends
Park Entrance
CAMP MINNIE–MICKEY
3
DISNEY'S ANIMAL KINGDOM
Disney Buses to Resorts and other Parks

rollercoaster around a mountain railroad bound for the foot of Mount Everest has a bit of everything. The ride is not so quick-paced that you'll miss the fine views over the Animal Kingdom and beyond as you climb up the mountain, or fail to be absorbed by your close encounter with a yeti (aka abominable snowman), but keeps the adrenaline flowing throughout with some wickedly disconcerting moments, such as when the train falls backwards down the mountain, spins


Affection Section
RAFIKI'S PLANET WATCH
Conservation Station
Wildlife Express Train
RESTAURANTS, CAFÉS & BARS
Rainforest Café 3
Royal Anandapur Tea Company 2
Dawa Bar 1
Restroom
First Aid Point
Information
ASIA
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Maharajah Jungle Trek
Kali River Rapids
Expedition Everest-Legend of the Forbidden Mountain
2
Discovery River
Finding Nemo-The Musical
Primeval Whirl
DINOLAND U.S.A.
DINOSAUR
0
50 yds

around in complete darkness, and emerges into daylight traveling once again in a forward direction. The scenery is as realistic as you'd expect from Disney, and the yeti theme never impinges on the thrill factor, or vice versa.

DINOSAUR

DinoLand U.S.A. Minimum height 40"/102cm. FASTPASS accepted.

More exciting than the usually tranquil journeys through Disney's Audio-Animatronics landscapes – which are populated here by some

▲ DINOSAUR

extremely large robot dinosaurs – this enjoyable ride on a twelve-seat "Time Rover" transports you back 65 million years with a mission to save a friendly Iguanadon from extinction. You'll experience plenty of short drops and sudden stops in the dark as beasts spring menacingly from the prehistoric forest, roaring all the while. Air and smoke cannons, strobes, and other special effects further enhance the sense of danger.

Other rides and attractions

Both Africa and Asia have been constructed with great attention to detail, and strolling around them is a pleasure in itself. **Asia** has the edge over Africa in terms of scenery, which has been given an eye-catching centerpiece in Expedition Everest's imposing mountain. **Africa** boasts some extremely talented African musicians, dancers, and acrobats who perform at regular intervals throughout the day at various locations.

DinoLand U.S.A. is really little more than a fairground, where the only animals present are of the stuffed variety – which you can win in various fairground-style games – or Audio-Animatronics. Dominating this corner of the park are the twisting tracks of **Primeval Whirl** (FASTPASS accepted), a low-speed rollercoaster that tries to make up for its sluggishness by spinning buggies that make you want to puke.

Insider tip

Expedition Everest – Legend of the Forbidden Mountain is still new enough to make it the ride that everyone wants to go on. To experience it in good time, arriving as soon as the park opens is vital. If you get to Expedition Everest in the mid-morning on busy days, you're likely to be in for an extremely long wait (over two hours is not uncommon) in the regular line, and any FASTPASS issued at this time will be for the mid-afternoon, thus preventing you from obtaining another FASTPASS for another attraction during the bulk of your day in the park.

Camp Minnie-Mickey features several live shows and plenty of Disney characters signing autographs.

Live shows

Flights of Wonder

Asia. Watch in awe as some of the world's most beautiful birds, including owls and falcons (although the avian cast list does change from day to day), swoop over and even interact with the audience in the park's most charming live show.

Finding Nemo – The Musical

DinoLand U.S.A. The actors in this musical production of *Finding Nemo* use puppets rather than dress up in costumes to tell the popular story. Even though the piscean characters are tremendously realistic, it's hard not to focus on the humans, who, it must be said, look pretty ridiculous prancing around and singing while holding fish on sticks.

Festival of The Lion King

Camp Minnie-Mickey. It helps if you like *The Lion King* soundtrack for this one, which is played repeatedly, as a huge cast of singers, dancers, acrobats, and characters from the movie put on a visually captivating and winningly energetic Broadway-style show.

Pocahontas and Her Forest Friends

Camp Minnie-Mickey. Very much the show for young children, this small-scale production based on the Disney movie *Pocahontas* consists of little more than a girl prattling to a tree, cameo appearances by a few cute live animals, and a song.

▲ FESTIVAL OF THE LION KING

Shops

Mombasa Marketplace/ Ziwani Traders

Africa. The Mombasa Marketplace section of this shop sells authentic African crafts such as wooden statues, jewelry, and musical instruments – all infinitely more interesting than the stock at the adjoining Ziwani Traders, which consists of the usual Disney merchandise.

Restaurants and cafés

Rainforest Café

Just before the park entrance ☎407/938-9100, Ⓦwww.rainforestcafe.com. One of two Orlando locations (the other is in Downtown Disney's Marketplace ☎407/827-8500) of this safari-themed restaurant, where the jungle decor is more promising than the rather

▲ RAINFOREST CAFÉ

mediocre menu of pasta dishes, steaks, and various shrimp concoctions. The enormous desserts are much more appealing; chocolate-lovers will sell their souls for the "Sparkling Volcano" brownie cake. Mains $15–25, desserts under $15.

Royal Anandapur Tea Company

Asia. Selling caffeine-rich teas, chais (spiced milk tea), and several coffee drinks to help keep you going.

Bars

Dawa Bar

Africa. The allegedly rum-based cocktails served here are pretty watered down, so get your buzz instead from the energetic performances by African drummers, dancers, and acrobats that take place nearby. You can sit down in the bar and watch them.

The rest of Walt Disney World

Beyond the four main theme parks, the rest of Walt Disney World is a mixed bag: some sections are worth setting aside a day or two to visit, while others are unabashed vehicles to get you to spend your hard-earned dollar on everything and anything that bears the Disney name. Many of the attractions do at least offer a refreshing departure from the amusement-park concept in that they are intended for adults rather than children. Two excellent water parks provide welcome relief on hot days, and unique diversions such as stock-car driving and behind-the-scenes tours of some of the main theme parks add texture to the Disney experience. Sprinkled throughout are Disney's resort hotels (see Accommodation), which, in addition to offering some decent dining options, serve as mini-theme parks in themselves, each occupying its own landscaped plot, usually with several swimming pools and a beach beside an artificial lake, and based on some dreamy vacation theme.

Blizzard Beach

Near Disney's Hollywood Studios and All-Star Resorts ☎407/560-3400. Daily 9am–6pm or later in summer, 10am–5pm in winter. Adults $39, children 3–9 $33. Opened in 1995, this water park is meant to resemble a ski resort built in Florida after a freak snowstorm and now melting away under the sun. The theme may smack a little of desperation, but this in no way detracts from Blizzard Beach's visceral appeal. Those fond of thrill rides will head straight to the top of the snow-covered "mountain" that overlooks the park (taking the stairs rather than the busy chairlift is much quicker) to experience **Summit Plummet**, a terrifyingly steep 120-foot drop in the guise of a ski jump – the tallest and fastest water slide in the US and the most exhilarating ten seconds in Orlando (women would be well advised to wear a one-piece instead of bikini for this one). The other rides are tamer, but still good fun. The **Slush Gusher** speed-slide runs parallel to Summit Plummet, but at a less intimidating angle, while at the two-lane **Downhill Double Dipper** you can race against someone down a 200-foot water slide. All three of these rides have a minimum height requirement of 48"/122cm.

Once exhausted, take time to relax in the calm wave-pool at **Melt-Away Bay** and sunbathe on the sandy beach that surrounds it. Arrive early to secure a deck chair – on hot, sunny days it's best to be there when the gates open.

▲ TYPHOON LAGOON

Typhoon Lagoon

Just south of Downtown Disney ☎ 407/560-4141. Daily 10am–5pm in winter, 9am–6pm or later in summer. Adults $39, children 3–9 $33. The rides here are less intimidating than at Blizzard Beach, though still edgy enough to justify the cost of admission, and the tropical-island theme lends itself well to more sedate and relaxing activities, making this park a good choice for families with younger children. You can snorkel with benign sharks and pretty tropical fish in the saltwater **Shark Reef** or be swept gently along by the slow building six-foot waves generated in the gigantic **Surf Pool** around which the park's other rides are built. Of these other rides, **Humunga Kowabunga**, a speed-slide where you have a choice of three different ways down, is the most exciting. In the park's newest ride, **Crush 'n' Gusher**, powerful jets of water propel you and your raft through several twists and turns, creating up-and-down movements vaguely akin to those on a rollercoaster. Both of these rides have a minimum height requirement of 48"/122cm.

Disney's Wide World of Sports

Two miles east of Disney's Animal Kingdom on Osceola Parkway ☎ 407/939-GAME, ⓦ www.disneyworldsports.com. Hours depend on daily events. Adults $11.75, children 3–9 $9. The most recent extension to Disney World opened in 1997 and, despite its name, is not a theme park based on sports. Instead, it's a 200-acre complex of stadiums, arenas, and sports fields bustling on any given day with soccer moms, high-school wrestling teams, or pro baseball players. There is a small section called **The Sports Experience** where you can ascertain your baseball pitching speed, kick a field goal, and test various other sporting skills, but this feels more like a fun

Insider tip

Unlike at the major parks, visitors can bring their own food (but no alcohol or glass containers) into both of the Disney water parks; Typhoon Lagoon is the more attractive place for a picnic, with the Surf Pool's large sandy beach, crammed with deck chairs, the obvious place to eat.

diversion for competing athletes than an attraction for visitors. Disney's Wide World of Sports is only really worth a special trip if you time it to coincide with a particular sporting event. The most publicized of these are the games played by the **Atlanta Braves** Major League Baseball team during spring training (Feb and March), which take place at the 9500-seat baseball stadium (tickets $14.50–23.50). The **Tampa Bay Buccaneers** NFL football team also conduct a pre-season training camp (July and Aug) at the complex: there are no organized games, but you can watch practice sessions without paying an extra charge. A full schedule of sporting events, both professional and amateur, is available on the website.

Richard Petty Driving Experience

Walt Disney World Speedway, at the south end of the Magic Kingdom parking lot ☎1-800/237-3889, Ⓦwww.1800bepetty.com. Although expensive, this attraction offers the ultimate payback for the NASCAR dad who has patiently walked his kids all over the Magic Kingdom. Here you can board your very own NASCAR-style stock-car, either as a driver or as a passenger, and ride it around a one-mile tri-oval track. The "Ride-Along" ($109) is the most basic of the several experiences offered: three laps of the track driven by an expert, reaching speeds of up to 150mph. If you want to take the wheel yourself – a much more daring but still safe enough choice – you can choose the intensive three-hour "Rookie Experience" ($399–449 depending on the time of year), at the end of which you drive eight laps; or the "King's Experience" ($799–849) and the "Experience of a Lifetime" ($1249–1299), longer variations whereby you get to drive eighteen and thirty laps respectively. For the Ride-Along, you must be at least 16; for the other experiences, you must be over 18 and have a valid driving license. If you're going to be driving, arrive thirty minutes in advance so that you can sign a liability waiver and be assigned a driving suit. The "Ride-Along" is available daily (9am–4pm); the other

EVENTS
BOARD
Baseball Stadium
Baseball Quadraplex
Milk House
Sports Fields
Track and Field Complex
Softball Quadraplex
Youth Fields
General Information

▲ DISNEY'S WIDE WORLD OF SPORTS

experiences are offered daily at 8am and 1pm except for Tuesday and Thursday.

Disney Institute

Buena Vista Drive, north of Downtown Disney ☎ 321/939-4600, Ⓦ www.disneyinstitute.com. The Disney Institute, modeled on a university campus done in Florida-style architecture, offers various business-related courses to anyone who wants to learn the techniques and practices that have made Disney so financially successful over the years. The interest for visitors, however, is in the Institute-run tours that give a behind-the-scenes look at many aspects of Walt Disney World. The best – and most expensive at $199 (including lunch) – is the "Backstage Magic" tour, which takes you along the tunnel system beneath the Magic Kingdom and offers a look at some of the backstage goings-on at EPCOT and Disney's Hollywood Studios, including the technology required to put on a show such as The American Adventure (see p.64). You'll also get a peek at the elaborate costumes inside the Disney wardrobe. The tour will appeal especially to Disney addicts who have seen the parks scores of times and now want a new perspective, or to the more analytical visitor. The majority of Disney visitors, however, will want to bag as many rides as possible and be seduced by the magic before having it all explained to them. Only do this one, then, if you're ready to be told that Santa Claus doesn't exist. The tour lasts about seven hours and you must be over 16. All of the Institute's other tours last three or three and a half hours and cost $69 or $99 per person. Of these, the most interesting are the "Disney by Design" tour (Mon–Fri only), which gives an insight into how architecture is used to evoke certain themes – a technique that Disney calls "architheming" – and the "Hidden Treasures" tour, where you'll learn more about the decidedly tricky task of applying the Disney ethos to some of the world's greatest cultures in EPCOT's World Showcase.

Restaurants

Artist Point

Wilderness Lodge ☎ 407/939-3463. Hearty cuisine from the Pacific Northwest – halibut, buffalo, and the recommended house specialty, cedar plank-roasted salmon – is complemented by wines from Washington and Oregon at this upscale restaurant with high wood-beamed ceilings. Most main dishes are in the $25–35 range.

California Grill

Contemporary Resort ☎ 407/939-3463. Panoramic views over the Magic Kingdom, an unpretentious dining room, fresh sushi and fish

Insider tip

Consider making a reservation to eat at the Contemporary Resort's California Grill to coincide with the Wishes firework display (see p.56) at the Magic Kingdom. You'll get a great view of the exploding rockets from your table as you stutter over a marriage proposal or news that there's another little one on the way who'll want to be taken to Disney World.

▲ FLYING FISH CAFÉ

dishes, and a some deliciously pungent cheeses accompanied by an extensive selection of (sometimes rare) California wines makes this one of Disney's best all-round restaurants. Most entrees are $25–35.

Everything Pop Shopping and Dining

Pop Century Resort ☎407/939-3463. The food court at this resort is a convenient place for a quick lunch or dinner, with something for most tastes, although don't expect much that's particularly healthy. Burgers (including a soy burger for vegetarians), hot dogs, pizzas, nachos, sloppy joes, and very sloppy joes are all on the menu, and most cost around $6.

Flying Fish Café

BoardWalk Inn ☎407/939-3463. Excellent fish dishes such as potato-wrapped red snapper are creatively prepared with seasonal ingredients and served in a dining room full of brightly hued fish motifs at this fashionable Disney restaurant. The drawback is the cost: most dinner entrees are well over $30.

Jiko – The Cooking Place

Animal Kingdom Lodge ☎407/939-3463. Enjoy typical American fare such as steaks and ribs with a welcome cosmopolitan flavor of curried sauces and exotic grains and spices, all washed down with no less than 65 different choices of exclusively South African wine. The waiters provide good service and can explain unfamiliar dishes to help you best select your meal. Dinner entrees typically cost $25–35.

Victoria & Albert's

Grand Floridian Resort & Spa ☎407/824-1893. Central Florida's top-rated restaurant offers excellent cuisine and plenty of pampering. The $125 (or $185 with wine), seven-course menu is an extravagant treat which changes slightly from day to day, but always includes luxurious starters such as foie gras or caviar, and gourmet main dishes prepared with great attention to presentation. If you want to sit at the Chef's Table ($175 or $245 with wine) in the kitchen, where the chef personally attends to your every whim, you'll have to reserve months in advance. Men must wear jackets and the kids probably won't fully appreciate the resident harpist, so consider making this an adults-only night out.

Downtown Disney

If Disney World were a small American town, Downtown Disney would be its shopping mall. Bordered by a lake on one side and the Interstate (I-4) on the other, its three distinct areas – West Side, Pleasure Island, and Marketplace – are full of shops and restaurants that are more varied and interesting than those on offer at the theme parks, but still not overly original in the scheme of things. You'll also find a multi-screen cinema, a high-profile Cirque du Soleil show, and the video-game wonderland of DisneyQuest, along with several adults-only clubs and discotheques that represent Disney's contribution to the Orlando nightlife scene. It's free to enter Downtown Disney and stroll around; if you want to sample the nightlife, however, there's a charge. Note that the Disney buses only run to Downtown Disney from the resorts; there are no direct services from the theme parks.

West Side

Occupying roughly the western third of Downtown Disney, the emphasis in this area is on music and entertainment, and even its few eateries have an upbeat atmosphere in which your dinner conversation risks being drowned out by live music and other high-spirited goings-on. Among West Side's biggest names are the renowned Cirque du Soleil, which has a permanent base here, an outlet of the *House of Blues* chain, and a Virgin Megastore.

DisneyQuest

West Side. Sun–Thurs 11.30am–11pm, Fri–Sat 11.30am–midnight. Adults $37, children 3–9 $31. Spread rather claustrophobically over five floors are an assortment of virtual-reality games, some of which work very well indeed, others so pointless that their creators should take a virtual-reality check themselves. The better games are based loosely on rides at the Disney parks. **Virtual Jungle Cruise**, for example, puts you on a bumpy

▼ VIRTUAL JUNGLE CRUISE AT DISNEYQUEST

PLEASURE ISLAND
PLANET HOLLYWOOD

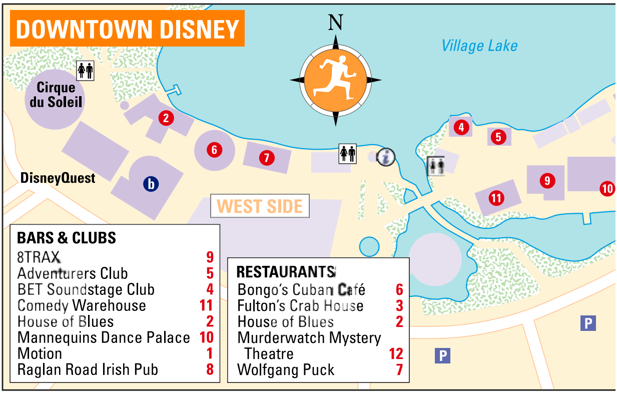
▲ PLEASURE ISLAND

raft-ride through digital rapids, while **Cyber-Space Mountain** lets you design your own rollercoaster, then experience it in a flight simulator. Less fulfilling is **Buzz Lightyear's AstroBlaster**, a high-tech bumper-car ride with asteroid-firing cannons that proves to be as confusing as the real-life version at the Magic Kingdom. Of the new-generation video games, **Ride the Comix** is one of the best. You look a bit silly manipulating the controls, but this is quickly forgotten in the heat of a very realistic 3-D battle with various comic-book villains.

Once you get bored of sampling the video-game technology of today, which includes a generous offering of contemporary arcade games at **The Underground Arcade** on the third floor, you can join the baby boomers racking up huge scores on the classic games of yesteryear, such as Pac-Man, Mario Brothers, and Donkey Kong, in sections devoted to these relics (the games, not the baby boomers) on the third and fifth floors.

Pleasure Island

☎ 407/939-2646. Free between 10am and 7pm, $21.95 after 7pm gives access to all nightclubs, or $10.95 for access to one club. You must be at least 21 to buy alcohol and enter all clubs except for Adventurers Club and Comedy Warehouse, where you must be at least 18. Everyone can enter Raglan Road Irish Pub. A six-acre island in the middle of Downtown Disney, full of pseudo-warehouses and made to look as though it has been abandoned, is the setting for Disney's foray into adult-focused entertainment. Its faux-ghetto style would have made a handsome red-light district, but Disney has instead opted to fill Pleasure Island with a bunch of nightclubs that are as middle-of-the-road as one would expect; in truth, there are more interesting nightlife options in downtown Orlando. For those staying on Disney property, though, Pleasure Island is very convenient, as buses link Downtown Disney to all of the Disney resorts and are timed to run until a little after the clubs close at 2am. Downtown Orlando, on the other hand, is at least a twenty-minute drive away, and there's no public transport at night. The all-access ticket price encourages club-hopping, which is the best way to enjoy Pleasure Island. You can spend a short time at each club taking in the decor and atmosphere before deciding which one appeals most.



BARS & CLUBS	
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House of Blues	2
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Marketplace

The rest of Downtown Disney consists of shops and restaurants in the appropriately named Marketplace, a bustling, open-air mall filled with browsing shoppers. Aside from the usual Disney stores, including the mother of all merchandise outlets, you can stock up on LEGO, gourmet chocolates, and scented soaps, although bargains are difficult to find. Note that all of Downtown Disney's shops offer free delivery to any Disney resort. The restaurants are mainly of the themed variety, and the menus are generally less adventurous than those at the West Side eateries.

Live shows

Cirque du Soleil

West Side ⓣ407/939-1298, ⓦwww.cirquedusoleil.com. Shows Tues–Sat 6pm & 9pm. Adults $65–114, children 3–9 $52–91. The Cirque du Soleil has made Downtown Disney its permanent home, presenting its fascinating 90-minute show *La Nouba* in a 1600-seat theater ten times a week. A tapestry of life and its emotions rather than a conventional narrative story, the show takes you on a journey through an offbeat world where dreams and reality intertwine. The spectacle features the company's famed acrobats and gymnasts performing feats of strength, agility, and coordination against a backdrop of surreal sets, with a generous dose of comedic routines thrown in for good measure. The elaborate costumes, music, and choreography add greatly to the experience. The one drawback: as good as the show is, the prices seem a little high for what you get. With this in mind, note that the theater slopes gently upwards, so the cheaper seats at the back provide almost as good a view as the more expensive ones towards the front.

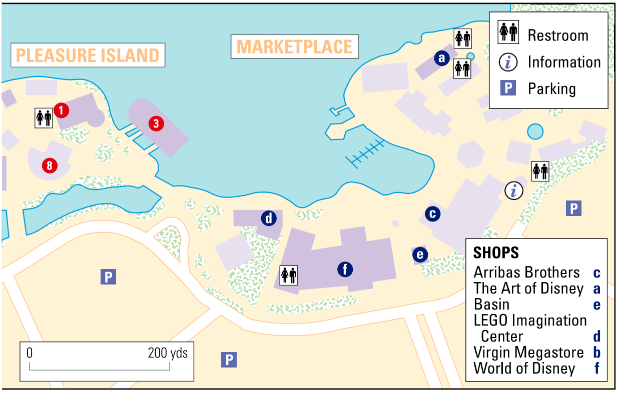
Shops

Arribas Brothers

Marketplace. Pop in to watch the onsite artisans create some pretty decent glasswork while fielding questions about their craft.

Basin

Marketplace. Some of the most fragrant (and expensive) bars of


PLEASURE ISLAND
MARKETPLACE
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200 yds
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1
3
8
12

soap that you'll ever smell are among the all-natural bath accessories and cosmetics sold here.

LEGO Imagination Center

Marketplace. Leave the kids to play with all kinds of LEGO products while you pose for photos beside the giant LEGO models of robots, dinosaurs, and the like.

The Art of Disney

Marketplace. The watercolors, sculptures, and other limited-edition artwork of Disney characters and landmarks are several cuts above the usual merchandise, but you'd have to be a real connoisseur to fork out the many dollars (often in the hundreds) to own one.

Virgin Megastore

West Side. Music CDs of every genre, DVDs, books, and numerous other multimedia products. Plenty of music listening posts provide a good way to kill some time.

World of Disney

Marketplace. More or less all of the cuddly toys, T-shirts, mugs, caps, and other overpriced souvenirs that you've seen for sale in the theme-park shops can be found here at the world's largest Disney merchandise store. Young girls will take great delight in visiting the Bibbidi Bobbidi Boutique, where, for a mere $44.95 (reserve by calling ☎407/939-7895), they can be dressed up like a princess.

▼ LEGO IMAGINATION CENTER

Restaurants

Bongo's Cuban Café

West Side ⓣ407/828-0999, ⓦwww.bongoscubancafe.com. Created by Latino pop stars Gloria and Emilio Estefan, the reasonable Cuban food is served up with plenty of salsa, courtesy of live orchestras on Fri and Sat evenings. Most main dishes are $15–20.

Fulton's Crab House

Marketplace ⓣ407/939-3463. Housed in a replica turn-of-the-century riverboat, this restaurant churns out reliably fresh seafood meals, although prices are steep, with lobster and crab dinners costing well over $30. Don't overlook the starters: the lobster bisque is especially good.

House of Blues

West Side ⓣ407/934-2583, ⓦwww.hob.com. In keeping with the jazz and blues played here (the restaurant has live music Thurs–Sat at 10.30pm), the food takes its inspiration from the Deep South, with decent attempts at dishes such as Cajun meatloaf and jambalaya, mostly in the $15–25 range. There's a popular Gospel Brunch every Sun ($32.50).

Murderwatch Mystery Theatre

At the Regal Sun Resort (formerly the Grosvenor Hotel), next to Downtown Disney, 1850 Hotel Plaza Blvd ⓣ407/828-4444, ⓦwww.murderwatch.com. Adults $39.95, children 9 & under $10.95. Shows on Sat only. The cast interacts with the audience in this Agatha Christie-style whodunit, which is played out in the dining room in between trips to the tasty all-you-can-eat buffet.

▲ FULTON'S CRAB HOUSE

Wolfgang Puck

West Side ⓣ407/938-9653, ⓦwww.wolfgangpuck.com. Four restaurants in one multilevel location: *The Dining Room* (dinner only); *The Café* for casual dining; *The Express* for self-service; and *B's Lounge & Sushi Bar* for sushi. At the lowest end of the price scale, you can tuck into pizza, pot roast, and

Insider tip

Bongo's Cuban Café and the Wolfgang Puck restaurants are among Downtown Disney's most popular places to eat. There's often a long wait for a table at dinner and more noise than you'd find elsewhere (particularly at Bongos, where lively Latin music accompanies the crowds). One way of bypassing the lines is to eat at the bar; and you'll find more peace and quiet at the tables outside – which are also good vantage points for people watching.

Insider tip

No matter how old you are – or how old you think you look – you will need to show ID before gaining entry to the clubs at Paradise Island; even thirty- and forty-year olds are not exempt. And because this is Disney, you'll only be allowed to have some unwholesome fun by showing government-issued ID. To be on the safe side, have either your driving license (for Americans) or your passport (for everyone else) available.

savory sandwiches at *The Express* for $10–15, while *The Dining Room* serves filet mignon, veal *wienerschnitzel* and such, prepared in a gourmet style for $25–40. The service can be variable.

Bars and clubs

8TRAX

Pleasure Island. Opens at 8pm.

Revolving disco balls are much in evidence at this dance club where 1970s and 1980s music is played to an enthusiastic crowd of baby boomers. Very kitsch, but it can be fun if you're in the right mood.

Adventurers Club

Pleasure Island. Opens at 7pm.

This is the most original – and enjoyable – Pleasure Island nightspot, loosely based on a 1930s gentlemen's club and furnished with a motley collection of wall masks (some of which unexpectedly start speaking), deer heads, and assorted flea-market furniture. Between scheduled shows that take place every twenty minutes or so throughout the evening – including everything from cabarets to Balderdash competitions – actors and actresses move surreptitiously (despite their period attire) among the crowd and strike up loud and eccentric conversations with unsuspecting audience members. The shows are designed to get everyone mingling, so this is a good place for shy singles who find

▼ BET SOUNDSTAGE CLUB

BET SoundStage Club

conventional nightclubs a bit too daunting.

BET Soundstage Club

Pleasure Island. Opens at 9pm. Owned by Black Entertainment Television and possibly Pleasure Island's most popular club on account of the hip-hop and R&B it plays.

Comedy Warehouse

Pleasure Island. Four shows nightly (8pm, 9.05pm, 10.15pm & 11.45pm). The comedians have to keep the jokes clean and relatively PC, but aren't afraid to send up Mickey and friends every now and then. Plenty of improvisation and audience interaction. Each show lasts about thirty minutes.

House of Blues

West Side ☎ 407/934-2583, ⓦ www.hob.com. Shows usually start between 7–9pm. Backed financially by the Blues Brothers themselves, plus other celebrities such as Aerosmith, the 2000-seat Music Hall concert venue showcases the talents of top soul, blues, and rock 'n' roll artists from around the world.

Mannequins Dance Palace

Pleasure Island. Opens at 9pm. Notable for its massive rotating dancefloor (mind your step when getting on it, particularly after a few drinks) and the best lighting and sound systems of any of the Pleasure Island clubs, this is Disney at its most risqué. Electronic dance music dominates and the place rarely gets going until around midnight.

▲ MOTION

Motion

Pleasure Island. Opens at 8pm. It seems as though the ideas were running thin when this club was devised, resulting in a tepid stream of top-40 tunes and a large screen showing music videos.

Raglan Road Irish Pub

Pleasure Island ☎ 407/938-0300, ⓦ www.raglanroadirishpub.com. Opens at 11am. Irish-owned and operated, this family-orientated pub features folk music and beer, although there's nothing very Irish about the food (main dishes $10–15), except for the stout sausages.

Universal Studios

Like Disney, Universal's theme-park presence in Florida results from a similar successful venture in California. In Universal's case, it was a tour of its studios in Los Angeles, which they reprised in Orlando in 1990. Subsequent multi-million-dollar cash infusions have turned Universal Studios into a full-fledged theme park – which also functions as a working production studio – similar in style and scale to Disney's Hollywood Studios. The rides, most of which are based on disaster films, horror movies, or action flicks, appeal especially to an adult audience. Little attempt has been made to water down their intensity (as Disney has a tendency to do), and the special effects are superb.

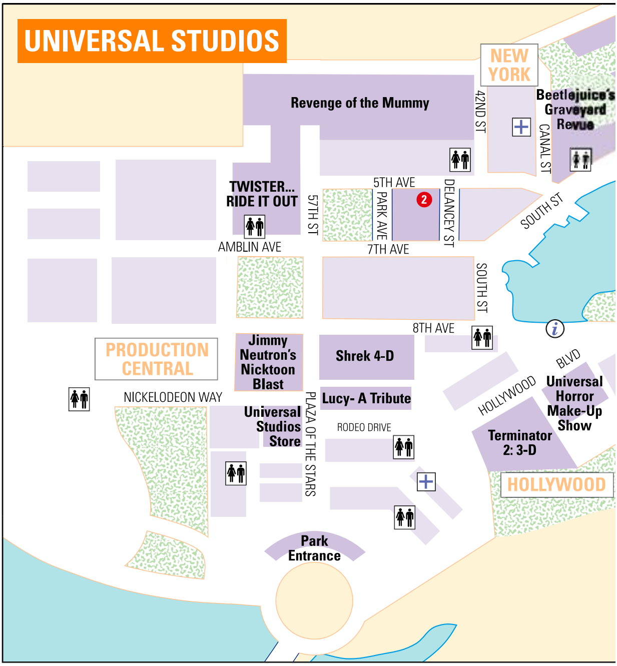
The park itself is arranged around a large lagoon and nominally divided into several areas. New York, Hollywood, San Francisco, and Amity (the New England town where Jaws took place) are impeccably replicated in street sets. Production Central, World Expo, and Woody Woodpecker's KidZone are less distinctive, containing lots of attractions but little eye-catching scenery.

For park hours, prices, and FASTPASS information, see "Theme park practicalities" in Essentials.

Shrek 4-D

Production Central. Universal Express accepted. Conceived before the film *Shrek 2* came out (in 2004), this delightful 3-D presentation continues where the original movie finished. If you missed *Shrek*, watch carefully as the basic plot is explained on a Magic Mirror (à la *Snow White*) in the lobby before you enter the theater. However, even if you're unfamiliar with – or don't care about – the storyline,

▼ SHREK 4-D


UNIVERSAL STUDIOS
NEW YORK
Revenge of the Mummy
42ND ST
Beetlejuice's Graveyard Revue
CANAL ST
TWISTER... RIDE IT OUT
57TH ST
5TH AVE
PARK AVE
2
DELANCEY ST
SOUTH ST
AMBLIN AVE
7TH AVE
SOUTH ST
8TH AVE
PRODUCTION CENTRAL
Jimmy Neutron's Nicktoon Blast
Shrek 4-D
HOLLYWOOD
BLVD
Universal Horror Make-Up Show
NICKELODEON WAY
Lucy- A Tribute
Universal Studios Store
PLAZA OF THE STARS
RODEO DRIVE
Terminator 2: 3-D
HOLLYWOOD
Park Entrance

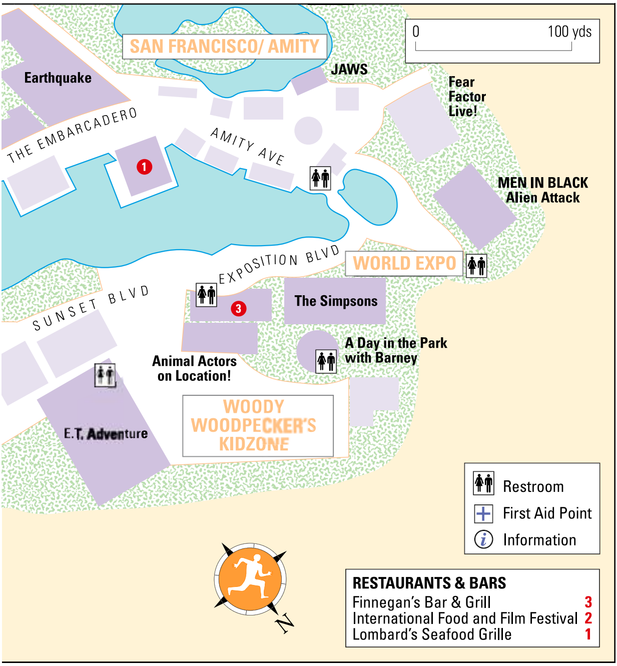
the wonderful animated graphics, accompanied by more "feelies" than any other 3-D attraction in Orlando are totally enthralling. Your chair moves almost as much as a flight simulator as it mimics things such as a carriage ride through the woods, and the adventure provides plenty of opportunities to spray you with water – which are rarely missed. Indeed, if the attraction has a downside, it's that these water sprays can become a little annoying after a while.

Jimmy Neutron's Nicktoon Blast

Production Central. Minimum height 40"/102cm. Universal Express accepted. This hugely popular attraction, helped perhaps by its location near the park entrance rather than its quality, uses flight-simulator technology to reasonable effect as you're taken on a journey featuring

Insider tip

Two major attractions, **Shrek 4-D** and **Jimmy Neutron's Nicktoon Blast**, lie just beyond the park entrance. Since Universal Express passes (see p.180) for these two run out quickly on busy days, get the pass for one of these attractions before going further into the park (Shrek 4-D is more worthwhile). Don't bother getting a Universal Express pass for shows or attractions that run to fixed times (such as Terminator 2: 3-D); just turn up ten minutes or so before the scheduled show time.


SAN FRANCISCO/ AMITY
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Earthquake
JAWS
Fear Factor Live!
THE EMBARCADERO
AMITY AVE
1
MEN IN BLACK Alien Attack
EXPOSITION BLVD
WORLD EXPO
SUNSET BLVD
3
The Simpsons
A Day in the Park with Barney
Animal Actors on Location!
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N
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RESTAURANTS & BARS
Finnegan's Bar & Grill 3
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Jimmy Neutron and a panoply of other Nickelodeon cartoon characters such as SpongeBob and The Rugrats. The best part of the ride is the animated graphics, which do a good job at bringing the characters to life and lend some credence to the storyline: a chase to retrieve a stolen rocket. However, the screen is set too far back from your "Rocket Pod," so that often you feel like you're simply watching Jimmy's adventures in a cinema rather than actually doing them with him.

Revenge of the Mummy

New York. Minimum height 48"/122cm. Universal Express accepted. Single-rider line available. The park's only rollercoaster starts off slowly as you travel through scenes from the eponymous movie, and never builds up enough momentum to satiate hardcore thrill-seekers – the high-speed part of the ride lasts a mere thirty seconds or so. Enjoy this one, then, for the theme, which

▼ REVENGE OF THE MUMMY

is mainly conveyed by video images of mummies speaking in sinister voices, and some deft touches, such as when your coaster takes an unexpected backward plunge into darkness or is attacked by fireballs.

TWISTER…RIDE IT OUT

New York. Universal Express accepted. The awesome power of a tornado is re-created superbly in a few devastating minutes in this short attraction padded with a bit too much preliminary footage of how the movie *Twister* was made. After the film, you walk on to a movie set and witness (in a sheltered spot) the wind, rain, and eventually the tornado itself tear through a small Oklahoma town. The effects are frighteningly realistic, except, that is, for the cow hanging from a rope that flies past you in the midst of the storm.

Earthquake

San Francisco/Amity. Universal Express accepted. This attraction, vaguely akin to Disney's Hollywood Studios' Backlot Tour, starts off with a methodical and not particularly riveting explanation of how movie special effects have evolved over the years, focusing on the 1974 film *Earthquake* starring Charlton Heston, in which buildings were made to rock simply by shaking the cameras. You then board a San Francisco subway train and enter a scene from the film, where much more sophisticated special effects give you a terrifying idea of what it would feel like to be caught underground when an 8.3 Richter-scale quake hits.

▼ JAWS

JAWS

San Francisco/Amity. Universal Express accepted. The nerve-jangling *Jaws* theme makes this one of the park's more popular attractions, but one gets the sense that more could have been done with such promising material. There are some good special effects, notably the exploding petrol station towards the end of the ride, as an abnormally large and nasty shark disrupts your boat-tour through Amity's normally peaceful waters. Although the shark keeps you on edge by looming unexpectedly out of the water, there are few really scary moments, and the whole thing ends rather abruptly without giving you the time to be fully absorbed in the adventure. The boat-driver's cheesy and rather mechanical commentary does little to enhance the sense of impending doom.

MEN IN BLACK Alien Attack

World Expo. Minimum height 42"/107cm. Universal Express accepted. Single-rider line available. The idea in this ride is to zap as many aliens as you can, accumulating points after each successful shot, in an attempt to

▲ MEN IN BLACK ALIEN ATTACK

pass your MIB agent training. You'll perform this task while traveling slowly through a target range in a six-person buggy, each seat equipped with a laser gun and a scoreboard. However, in the absence of a coherent explication of the game's rules, no one really knows when something has been hit and by whom. Many will be inclined, therefore, to just sit back and ignore the game, enjoying instead the well-designed monsters trying to frighten you. The single-rider line here is a mixed blessing: it obviously cuts waiting times for those willing to ride alone, although part of the fun of the ride is competing with your friends and family to see who can get the best score.

E.T. Adventure

Woody Woodpecker's KidZone. Universal Express accepted. Your mission is to take E.T. home so that he can save his dying planet. Aside from bicycle buggies that give the impression that you're flying, there's not much to commend the ride – this one will appeal mostly to small children, much like the other rides in Woody Woodpecker's KidZone. The (often long) waiting line winds through a forest full of E.T.-like characters, including Botanicus, a wise elder from E.T.'s planet, providing a welcome distraction as you wait your turn. And E.T. saying your name at the end of the adventure is a nice touch, although not quite enough to make this anything more than a mediocre attraction.

Terminator 2: 3-D

Hollywood. Universal Express accepted. After a lengthy and enjoyable presentation of the megalomaniac corporation Cyberdyne Systems' vision of the future, complete with battery-operated butterflies, robot soldiers, and a missile defense system that would make the likes of Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush drool, you're led into a theater to witness the ensuing battle between the machines and two hapless humans aided by Arnold Schwarzenegger's Terminator character. Even though the show is relatively long and uses a good mixture of live action, special effects, and 3-D imagery, the overall impression is only marginally more interesting than watching the movie in the cinema.

Other rides and attractions

Due to open in the spring of 2008 – and replacing one of the park's best rides, Back to the Future The Ride – is **The Simpsons**, which will combine flight-simulator technology with the irreverent humor of the much-loved Simpsons cartoon family.

The rest of the park merits only a cursory glance. This might prove tricky for those with kids in tow, since youngsters will gravitate naturally to the playgrounds and fairground rides of Woody Woodpecker's KidZone, and will want to stay there far too long for most parents' liking. A good carrot to get them off the rides is **A Day in the Park with Barney** (Universal Express accepted), a show where the youngest of visitors can sing and clap along with Barney and company in an enchanting "forest" in-the-round. At the other end of the age scale, grown-ups old enough to remember Lucille Ball will enjoy **Lucy – A Tribute**, a museum-style exhibit (with no wait) featuring clips, props, costumes, and the like.

▼ BEETLEJUICE'S GRAVEYARD REVUE BUILDING

Live shows

Animal Actors on Location!

Woody Woodpecker's KidZone. Universal Express accepted. A vast improvement on the park's previous animal show, the lackluster Animal Planet Live!, this one reveals some of the tricks used to turn animals into actors for film and TV. Although the cast of mainly dogs and birds sometimes forget their lines, it's all interesting and cute to watch.

Beetlejuice's Graveyard Revue

San Francisco/Amity. Universal Express accepted. A motley crew of monsters perform high-tempo renditions of well-known rock songs mixed in with contemporary hip-hop tunes by the likes of the Black Eyed Peas. There's little to no plot, but the energetic song and dance, as well as some risqué humor, just about make this worth seeing.

Fear Factor Live!

San Francisco/Amity. Universal Express accepted. Six contestants compete against one another in various challenges along the same lines as the popular TV show. The tests have been adapted for theme-park use, but not watered down so much that they lose their punch. If you want to be a contestant, present yourself at the venue about 90 minutes before show time; as in the TV version, fit, young, good-looking people probably stand the best chance of being

Insider tip

A certain amount of reverse psychology is required if you want to be picked as a volunteer at the Universal Horror Make-Up Show: Don't raise your hand or make eye-contact; shy people who look like they're scared of their own shadows are the main targets.

chosen – although you don't have to show up in a bikini.

Universal Horror Make-Up Show

Hollywood. Universal Express accepted. The park's best show – and one of the most entertaining in Orlando – relies on amusingly tasteless jokes to divulge some of the secrets of horror-movie special effects. The humor depends to a great extent on the squeamish nature of the (often female) volunteers from the crowd, who are made to jump and scream by the sadistic host as he springs various gruesome surprises.

Shops

Universal Studios Store

Plaza of the Stars, Production Central. Your one-stop-shop for Universal merchandise, where you'll find a bit of everything, from Spider-Man to SpongeBob. Since this store stocks most of what you'll find elsewhere in the park and is conveniently close to the entrance, consider making your purchases here just before leaving the park.

Restaurants

Finnegan's Bar & Grill

5th Ave, New York. This place has a convivial atmosphere for a theme park restaurant, thanks mainly to its live Irish music and 3–7pm happy hour. Guinness is served on tap, while pale imitations of fish and chips, shepherd's pie, and other Anglo-Saxon specialties are served in two dining rooms for $11–13. The dining room with its entrance on 5th Avenue is cozier than the one on Delancey Street.

International Food and Film Festival

Exposition Blvd, World Expo. Despite the promising name, this self-service restaurant offers just a couple of mediocre Oriental-style chicken dishes ($8.29) in addition to its burgers and pizzas, making it only marginally more cosmopolitan than the park's other eateries. The decor is sterile, but you can eat your food while watching movies, including classics and foreign films.

Lombard's Seafood Grille

The Embarcadero, San Francisco/Amity. Specializing in seafood, this is one of the park's smarter restaurants, even if the menu is limited to a few fish sandwiches and the odd pasta dish ($10–13). You can either eat inside or alfresco on a terrace overlooking the lagoon, peacefully away from the general hubbub.

Islands of Adventure

Just a five-minute walk from Universal Studios lies Islands of Adventure, which continues Universal's emphasis on adrenaline-pumping attractions for adults. The preponderance of excellent thrill rides here rely as much on speed as special effects to produce a buzz, setting Islands of Adventure apart from all other Orlando theme parks and outshining anything that Disney has to offer in this department. The park is divided into five sections, each with their own unique character: Marvel Super Hero Island and The Lost Continent have the most exciting rides, molded on comic-book heroes and ancient myths and legends respectively. Jurassic Park goes to town on the well-worn dinosaur motif in a scientific as well as scary way; Toon Lagoon uses cartoon characters to get you completely soaked; and the eye-catching Seuss Landing is where the kids can spin about on a variety of fairground-style rides.

For park hours, prices, and FASTPASS information, see "Theme park practicalities" in Essentials.

Incredible Hulk Coaster

Marvel Super Hero Island. Minimum height 54"/137cm. Universal Express accepted. While definitely a rollercoaster to be reckoned with, the loop-the-loops and plunges on this one would be far scarier if they were higher up – indeed, the proximity of the tracks to ground-level allow those milling about in the park to hear quite clearly the roar of the coaster and the screams of its passengers, making the ride seem more daunting than it actually is. By far the best part is the start: a high-speed catapult launch that apparently has the same thrust as an F-16 fighter jet. Two unexpected tunnels also give the ride some welcome variety.

▼ DOCTOR DOOM'S FEARFALL

Doctor Doom's Fearfall

Marvel Super Hero Island. Minimum height 52"/132cm. Universal Express accepted. Single-rider line available (accessed through the video arcade next to the ride's main entrance). This ride lasts barely a minute, with the first few seconds the only

Insider tip

Upon entering the park, turn left and grab a Universal Express pass for either the **Incredible Hulk Coaster** or **The Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man**. Then consider touring the park in counter-clockwise direction, against the general flow of traffic. This will also get you to the park's other popular rollercoaster, **Dueling Dragons**, quicker than if you were to go clockwise.

thrilling part as you're shot 150 feet into the air and experience a moment of weightlessness on the way down. After this brief adrenaline rush, there's little more to do than take in the panoramic views over the park. Only really worthwhile if there's a short wait or you use the single-rider line.

The Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man

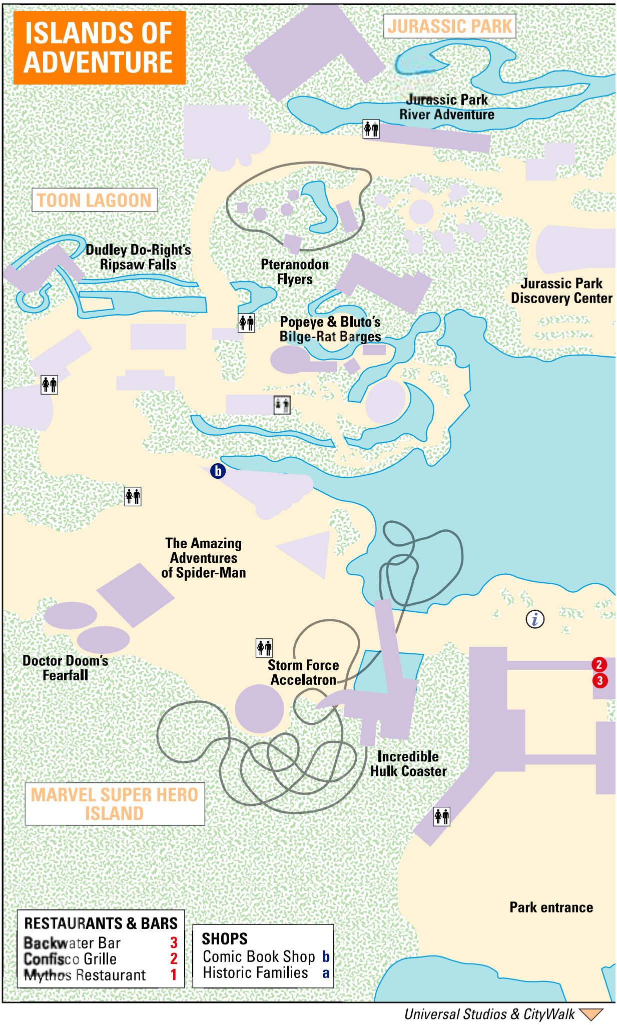
Marvel Super Hero Island. Minimum height 40"/102cm. Universal Express accepted. This is one of the best rides in Orlando. The ever-popular Spider-Man theme is a major draw in itself, but it's the way in which the super hero's escapades are brought so vividly to life that makes this ride stand out. Your buggy moves at a fast pace (though not rollercoaster-fast) through a high-rise city where Spider-Man battles against a variety of villains. With the aid of superb 3-D imagery (don't forget to pick up your glasses just before boarding the buggy) and the occasional sensory effect such as a blast of hot air or spurt of water, you're drawn completely into the story, nowhere more so than the exhilarating moment when you're whizzing up and down in between the skyscrapers.

Dudley Do-Right's Ripsaw Falls

Toon Lagoon. Minimum height 44"/112cm. Universal Express accepted. Single-rider line available. Thanks to the final 60-foot drop in a hollowed-out-log boat that thoroughly drenches all four passengers, this attraction has the dubious reputation of being one of Orlando's wettest rides away from the water parks. Before the final drop, you're peppered with sprays and splashes of water as you ride along waterways in Dudley's hometown of Ripsaw Falls, which looks interesting from the outside, but contains disappointingly little to look at during the ride itself. You really will get soaked from head to toe on this one, so consider bypassing it on cooler days when it takes longer to dry off.

Jurassic Park River Adventure

Jurassic Park. Minimum height 42"/107cm. Universal Express accepted. Based on the *Jurassic Park* films, this ride substitutes a boat for a 4WD vehicle as you take a tour through a primeval zoo. The first part of the trip is your standard jaunt past several quite realistic dinosaurs lolling their heads up and down, baring teeth, and shooting spurts of water at you – not overly exciting. Things liven up when the raptor containment area is breached and various carnivorous beasts are on the loose, providing the cue for some decent special effects, pyrotechnics, and ultimately an unexpected 85-foot drop that gets you moderately wet.


ISLANDS OF ADVENTURE
JURASSIC PARK
Jurassic Park River Adventure
TOON LAGOON
Dudley Do-Right's Ripsaw Falls
Pteranodon Flyers
Jurassic Park Discovery Center
Popeye & Bluto's Bilge-Rat Barges
b
The Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man
i
2
3
Doctor Doom's Fearfall
Storm Force Accelatron
Incredible Hulk Coaster
MARVEL SUPER HERO ISLAND
Park entrance
RESTAURANTS & BARS
Backwater Bar 3
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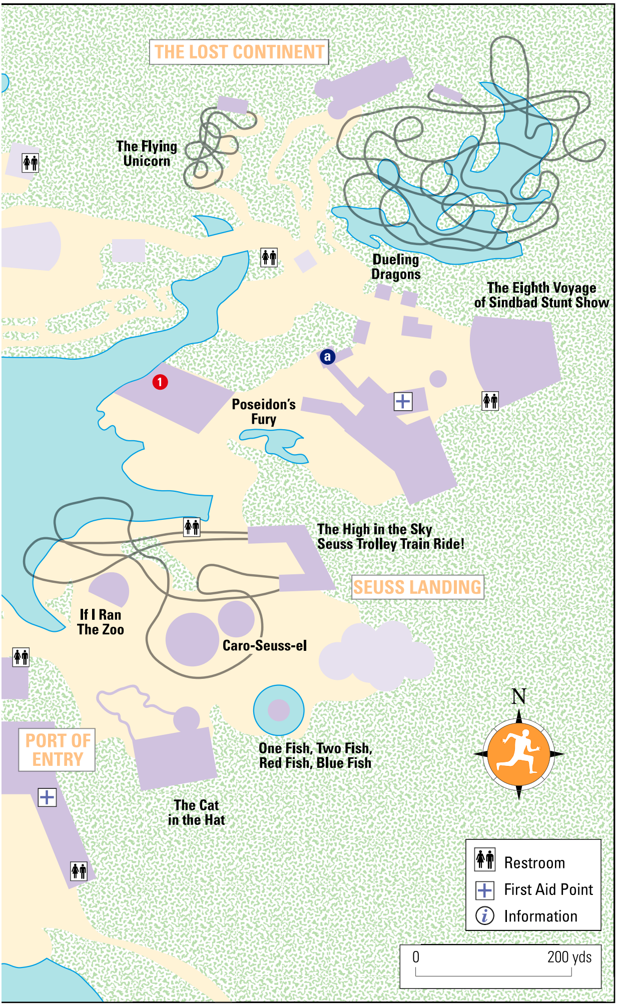
Mythos Restaurant 1
SHOPS
Comic Book Shop b
Historic Families a
Universal Studios & CityWalk

Dueling Dragons

The Lost Continent. Minimum height 54"/137cm. Universal Express accepted.

This is actually two rollercoasters, “Fire” and “Ice” (separate waiting lines for each; turn left for “Fire” and right for “Ice”), starting off parallel to one another, but then diverging to follow their own paths. Each ride is of a similar intensity and bristles with harrowing head-on near-misses with the other coaster, which makes sitting in the front row especially thrilling (there’s a special – and longer – waiting line for front-row riders). If all of this wasn’t enough, the seats leave your feet dangling precariously in mid-air, adding to


THE LOST CONTINENT
The Flying Unicorn
Dueling Dragons
The Eighth Voyage of Sindbad Stunt Show
a
1
Poseidon's Fury
The High in the Sky Seuss Trolley Train Ride!
SEUSS LANDING
If I Ran The Zoo
Caro-Seuss-el
PORT OF ENTRY
One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish
The Cat in the Hat
N
Restroom
First Aid Point
Information
0
200 yds

a sense of danger that no other rollercoaster in Orlando manages to equal.

Poseidon's Fury

The Lost Continent. Universal Express accepted. Trapped in Poseidon's temple, the assembled crowd has to rely on a wisecracking guide to survive the wrath of the gods in order to escape. This involves going through several chambers on foot, edging closer and closer to Poseidon and his nemesis, Lord Darkenon, who are both itching to have a fight. En route to the climax, in order to get from one chamber to another, you have to pass through a vortex of raging water, which

▲ POSEIDON'S FURY

proves to be the highlight of the adventure. The final battle scene is played out on a huge wrap-around screen, with plenty of real-life fireballs exploding in front of you before good prevails over bad. This attraction works well provided you have the patience to follow the plot; if your mind wanders, however, it can quickly become a little pointless.

Seuss Landing

This area of the park re-creates the wacky world of Dr Seuss, and as such the rides are designed for children. Take a few minutes, however, to stroll past the incredibly colorful scenery, admiring the way in which the architects have managed to avoid building anything in a straight line. For an aerial perspective, take a trip on **The High in the Sky Seuss Trolley Train Ride!**. Attractions here include **The Cat in the Hat**, which retells the famous story as you ride past various show scenes in spinning sofas; a standard merry-go-round called **Caro-Seuss-el**; the **If I Ran The Zoo** interactive playground; and **One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish**, a Flying Dumbo–style ride where the twist is that you can control the height of your flight so as to avoid being hit by water that squirts in time to the accompanying song. Universal Express is accepted for all of the above attractions except for If I Ran the Zoo.

▼ SEUSS LANDING

Onefish
two fish
redfish
bluefish

Other rides and attractions

Elsewhere in the park the emphasis on thrill rides is continued, with the focus shifting to a younger audience: in Marvel Super Hero Island, **Storm Force Accelatron** involves cars spinning and whirling to a noisy light show; and The Lost Continent's **The Flying Unicorn** (minimum height 36"/91cm) is a mini-rollercoaster which takes you on a fanciful flight through an enchanted forest. In Toon Lagoon, **Popeye & Bluto's Bilge-Rat Barges** (minimum height 42"/107cm) is a raft ride where, potentially at least, you stay dryer than Dudley Do-Right's Ripsaw Falls (see p.103); the major threat comes from malevolent spectators who pay 25 cents to release jets of water on passing rafts. The Jurassic Park area has an unexciting **Discovery Center** with several interactive exhibits based on dinosaurs, as well as a multi-level playground full of bones and fossils. The hang-glider-style gondolas that fly over the playground are **Pteranodon Flyers**, a fun-looking diversion which, unfortunately for grown-ups, can only be enjoyed if you're accompanied by a child between 36 and 56 inches tall. Universal Express is accepted for all of the above attractions except for Pteranodon Flyers.

Live shows

The Eighth Voyage of Sindbad Stunt Show

The Lost Continent. The park's one live show is an action-packed adventure in which Sindbad endeavors to rescue a princess from an evil witch. This quest is played out on an elaborate set using plenty of stunts, but it's the accompanying pyrotechnics that are most impressive.

Shops

Comic Book Shop

Marvel Super Hero Island. A great place for comic lovers, with books and magazines recounting the adventures of super-hero celebrities such as Spider-Man and The X-Men, as well as lesser-known B-Listers including Iron Man, Black Panther, and The Punisher.

▲ COMIC BOOK SHOP

▲ POPEYE & BLUTO'S BILGE-RAT BARGES

Historic Families

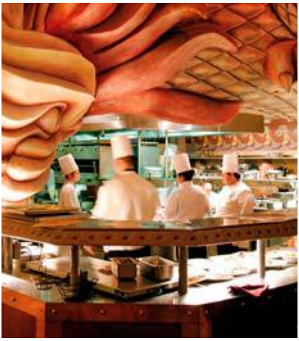
The Lost Continent. The heraldic charts and family-name histories probably sell better, but the swords and daggers – sometimes costing several hundred dollars – make for better window shopping. There's also some stylish chess sets for sale.

Restaurants

Confisco Grille

Port of Entry. The dark, themed dining room evokes some far-flung Customs House with various exotic confiscated items on display. Unfortunately the food is rather more mundane, with ordinary fajitas ($12.99–15.99) and bland Pad Thai ($14.99) the most daring dishes on the menu.

▼ CAPTION CAPTION CAPTION CAPTION



Mythos Restaurant

The Lost Continent. Open daily 11.30am—3pm. Consistently rated as one of Orlando's best theme-park restaurants, the interior decor, resembling the inside of an extinct volcano, feels a bit tacky considering the varied, upscale cuisine on offer. The menu changes regularly, but usually includes a couple of filling pasta dishes, perhaps a risotto, and something more refined like blueberry- and pistachio-crusted pork. Most main courses are around $15. This is the only restaurant at the Universal parks where you might need to make a reservation; call ☎407/224-4012.

Bars

Backwater Bar

Port of Entry. Adjoining *Confisco Grille*, this snug, rather nondescript bar with a few outdoor tables has a selection of alcoholic drinks – although before you get too excited, there's a one-drink limit per adult guest.

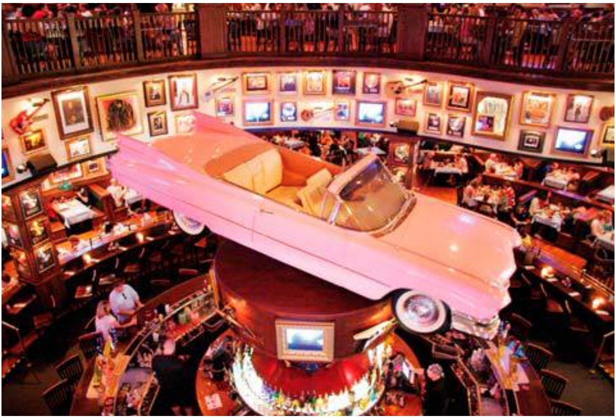
CityWalk

CityWalk is Universal's attempt to make its mark on the Orlando nightlife scene. Without the hyper-wholesome image that Disney has to live up to, it manages to be a slightly hipper alternative to Downtown Disney – and also a less expensive one. On the whole, though, it's all rather tame. The bars, nightclubs, and themed restaurants that are spread over two open-air levels on a wedge of land between Universal Studios and Islands of Adventure (both of which are within easy walking distance) have all been done very much with the tourist in mind. Indeed, compared to downtown Orlando's extensive and eclectic after-dark options, CityWalk (like Downtown Disney) can seem a little sterile and monotonous. Still, it's convenient if you're staying on Universal property or along nearby International Drive (Wet 'n' Wild is just a fifteen-minute walk away), or if you want to pop out of either of the Universal theme parks for a decent meal or a drink.

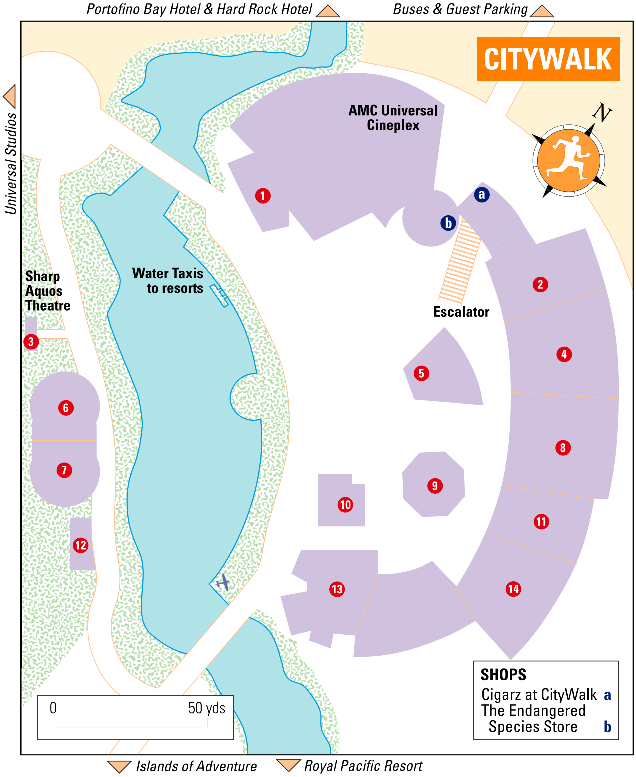
Hard Rock Café

6050 Universal Blvd ☎407/351-ROCK.

While there are certainly better places to eat in CityWalk than here, this *Hard Rock Café* does hold the distinction of being the world's largest. The overpriced burgers and sandwiches ($10–15) are served in a two-story, 600-seat dining area with wall-to-wall rock 'n' roll memorabilia and a revolving pink Cadillac smack in the middle – all very typical of the *Hard Rock* genre. The restaurant, as well as the adjoining 3000-capacity Hard Rock Live concert venue (see p.114), are housed in a realistic interpretation of Rome's Coliseum, adding some welcome architectural interest to CityWalk's generally



▲ HARD ROCK CAFÉ


Portofino Bay Hotel & Hard Rock Hotel
Buses & Guest Parking
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AMC Universal Cineplex
Universal Studios
Sharp Aquos Theatre
Water Taxis to resorts
Escalator
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SHOPS
Cigarz at CityWalk a
The Endangered Species Store b
Islands of Adventure
Royal Pacific Resort

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CLUBS, SHOWS & LIVE MUSIC	
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Bob Marley - A Tribute to Freedom	4
CityJazz	9
the groove	11
Hard Rock Live	7
Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville	13
Pat O'Brien's	8
Red Coconut Club	2

unremarkable collection of buildings.

AMC Universal Cineplex

6000 Universal Blvd ☎407/354-5998. Tickets $5–9. With the majority of Orlando's cinema complexes scattered around the city in inconveniently located shopping malls, this ultra-modern, twenty-screen complex with reasonable ticket prices and the usual selection of Hollywood films is something to consider after an energy-sapping day at one of the Universal theme parks. You can combine a movie with either access to all of CityWalk's clubs for $15.98 or a meal at one of the following restaurants for $21.95: *Jimmy Buffet's Margaritaville*, *Hard Rock Café*, *Latin Quarter*, *NASCAR Sports Grille*, *NBA City*, *Bob Marley – A Tribute to Freedom*, *Pat O'Brien's* (for these

CityWalk practicalities

CityWalk (☎407/363-8000, ⓦwww.citywalkorlando.com) is open daily 11–2am (some restaurants open later in the day – see the reviews for details). The **CityWalk Party Pass** costs only $11.99 ($15 if you want to take in a movie) and includes all-night access to *Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville*, *Bob Marley – A Tribute to Freedom*, *Latin Quarter*, *Pat O'Brien's*, *CityJazz*, *Red Coconut Club*, and *the groove*. Otherwise, individual cover charges to the clubs are $7. You must be at least 18 to enter the clubs, and 21 at *Bob Marley – A Tribute to Freedom* (after 9pm), *Red Coconut Club* (all night), and *the groove* (all night). Parking costs $11 during the day, but is free after 6pm.

restaurants, see pp.112–113), or *Pastamoré*, a rather ordinary Italian restaurant.

Live shows

Blue Man Group

Sharp Aquos Theatre ☎407/258-3626 or 1-888/340-5476, ⓦwww.blueman.com. Generally one or two shows a day. Adults $59 or $69, children under 9 $49 or $59. This strangely popular show is CityWalk's attempt to match Downtown Disney's Cirque du Soleil (see p.90). While Disney has opted for highly trained performers to pull in the crowds, Universal has relied on the more dubious talents of three bald, blue men making a fool of themselves on stage. Their drumming skills are impressive, but the series of random acts that comprise the rest of the show – anything from glorified food fights to paint being sprayed everywhere (people in the front rows are given plastic ponchos for protection) – are not. However, these weird shenanigans combined with plenty of audience participation do provide plenty of laughs, making this a mentally unchallenging night out.

▼ CIGARZ AT CITYWALK

Shops

Cigarz at CityWalk

6000 Universal Blvd. Novelty smokes as well as quality cigars are on sale at this store decorated to resemble an old Cuban cigar factory. Smoking is permitted in the small bar at the back, which sells a reasonable range of alcoholic drinks and is a quiet, out-of-the-way alternative to the busier nightspots.

The Endangered Species Store

6000 Universal Blvd. A merchandise store where the T-shirts are made from organic

▲ EMERIL'S

cotton and the cuddly toys and statues – some of them quite tasteful and attractive – are of animals threatened by extinction.

Restaurants

Bob Marley – A Tribute to Freedom

6000 Universal Blvd ☎407/224-3663. Opens at 4pm. Featuring a fairly representative cross-section of Jamaican cuisine, much of it prepared with spicy jerk seasoning and served in relatively small portions. The fish dishes – snapper, tuna, corvina, and the like – are generally more substantial and cost around $16. Once the live musical entertainment starts at around 8pm, the emphasis shifts from eating to drinking and dancing.

Emeril's

6000 Universal Blvd ☎407/224-2424, ⓦwww.emerils.com. CityWalk's most upscale restaurant is overseen by TV chef Emeril Lagasse. The dining room is simple – even a little austere – and while the food is excellently prepared, the choice of dishes – filet mignon, kobe hamburgers, braised beef with celery root puree – is not overly imaginative. Most dinner entrees cost $26–36.

Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville

6000 Universal Blvd ☎407/224-2155, ⓦwww.margaritavilleorlando.com. Reasonably priced Caribbean-style food such as jerk salmon ($18.95) and coconut shrimp ($15.95) served in an appropriately tropical setting, complete with a volcano exploding with margarita mix, which sets the scene for the energetic atmosphere that prevails here.

Latin Quarter

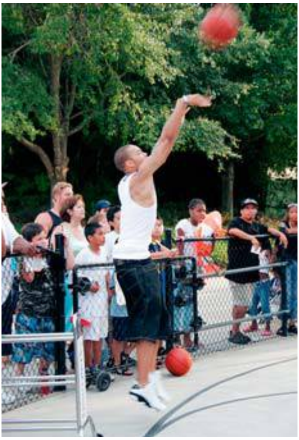
6000 Universal Blvd ☎407/224-3663. Opens at 4pm. Traditional dishes of Latin America – defined broadly to include fajitas and barbecue ribs – are given a "Nuevo Latino" contemporary touch, including a sumptuous paella containing several different types of seafood and snapper served with chorizo. Most main dishes cost $15–20.

NASCAR Sports Grille

6000 Universal Blvd ☎ 407/224-7223, ⓦ www.nascarsportsgrille.com. There's nothing extraordinary about the burgers and sandwiches (around $10) or the ribs and steaks ($20–25) served in this two-floor restaurant cluttered with NASCAR memorabilia, including full-sized cars suspended from the ceiling. Live and recorded sports are shown on the several TVs dotting the restaurant.

NBA City

6860 Universal Blvd ☎ 407/363-5919, ⓦ www.nbacity.com. Boasting more imaginative cuisine than is found at most themed restaurants, including chicken blue-cheese pasta (a dish that was served at the 2001 NBA All-Star game) and maple-glazed pork chops, *NBA City* also features an interactive area where you can test your basketball-throwing skills and see how high you can jump. Most main dishes cost $14–17.



▲ NBA CITY

Pat O'Brien's

6000 Universal Blvd ☎ 407/224-2106, ⓦ www.patobriens.com/orlando.html. Opens at 4pm. Re-creating perfectly the feel of Old New Orleans, with wrought-iron balconies and a relaxing outdoor patio with plenty of shade – the best place to savor decent, moderately priced dishes such as jambalaya ($9.95) and crawfish nachos ($9.25).

Clubs and live music

Bob Marley – A Tribute to Freedom

6000 Universal Blvd ☎ 407/224-3663. The house band plays passable covers of Marley songs, as well as other reggae tunes, and the place is usually very busy at weekends. Cocktails are predictably heavy on the rum, and you can also swig Jamaica's Red Stripe beer.

CityJazz

6000 Universal Blvd ☎ 407/224-2189. Sun–Thurs opens at 8pm, Fri & Sat opens at 7pm. Apart from the jazz memorabilia plastered on the walls, there's little that's very jazzy about this club decorated attractively in soft colors with tables around a stage. The live bands tend to play mainstream rock music rather than jazz, while at the weekends comedians and a hypnotist provide the entertainment.

the groove

6000 Universal Blvd. Opens at 9pm. CityWalk's only full-fledged dance club has a good sound system, plenty of flashing lights, and a huge dancefloor

Insider tip

The best thing about the water taxis that dock at a jetty in the center of CityWalk is that they're free. The taxis ply the waters to and from the three resorts on Universal property (see p.170), and the people who use them are assumed to be guests of the hotels; however, there is no check. The trip itself is a pleasant, gentle one along quiet waterways, giving a general overview of Universal property and providing a welcome respite from the crowds for half an hour or so. One of the highlights comes when you pull into the "bay" of the sleepy Italian seaside village that is the *Portofino Bay Hotel*.

where you can hear various styles of music which become more electronic as the night progresses. Three differently colored rooms (decorated in red, green, and blue) provide quieter spots for the generally young crowd to chill out. The occasional alcohol-free "teen night" from around 8pm to midnight gives adolescents their chance on the floor.

Hard Rock Live

6050 Universal Blvd ☎ 407/351-LIVE, ⓦ www.hardrocklive.com. Box office daily 10am–9pm. Ticket prices vary: usually $25–75. One of Orlando's major concert venues, this 3000-capacity auditorium – less grandiose inside than its Roman Coliseum exterior would suggest, but with a large stage and special effects galore – showcases musical acts (mainly rock bands), some of them famous, others hoping to be.

▼ WATER TAXIS

Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville

6000 Universal Blvd ☎ 407/224-2155, ⓦ www.margaritavilleorlando.com. High-tempo, infectious island-style music performed live nightly, plus the possibility of downing several different types of potent margaritas from $7 and up, make staying on after dinner a tempting proposition at this lively bar-restaurant.

Pat O'Brien's

6000 Universal Blvd ☎ 407/224-2106, ⓦ www.patobriens.com/orlando.html. This restaurant's piano bar is the focal point of the evening, as two musicians face off with baby grand pianos on a small stage. They play songs requested by the audience – which tends to be older than at other CityWalk nightlife venues – each one trying to outdo the other. A good sing-along usually ensues.

Red Coconut Club

6000 Universal Blvd ☎ 407/224-2425. Sun—Thurs opens at 8pm, Fri & Sat opens at 6pm. CityWalk's newest club is an attractive lounge where you can sip expensive martinis and listen to a live band playing an eclectic repertoire of songs that includes something for most tastes.

SeaWorld Orlando and Discovery Cove

SeaWorld Orlando is the pick of Florida's numerous marine parks and should not be missed. While it lacks the magical atmosphere of Disney and the exciting rides of Universal, it makes up for these deficiencies by presenting its huge collection of animals simply and stylishly in aquariums, pools, tanks, and carefully re-created natural habitats dotted around the park. The highlights are the large stadiums that play host to crowd-pleasing live shows featuring sea lions, dolphins and killer whales. SeaWorld also has the towering Kraken, one of the best rollercoasters in Orlando. Much more wildlife can be found across the road at Discovery Cove, owned, like SeaWorld, by Anheuser-Busch and a little different from anything else in Orlando. A park without a theme, a watery attraction without the slides, an aquarium without the glass tank, here the emphasis is on getting up close and personal with the animals. Swimming with dolphins is the star attraction, while pools filled with tropical fish and rays plus a colorful aviary provide further opportunities for nature encounters.

Stingray Lagoon

SeaWorld. Situated near SeaWorld's entrance, this is the first of several smaller displays that play a supporting role to the large-scale shows and rides, but are well worth a look in their own right. The appeal here is that you can stroke the unexpectedly sociable rays (with stingers safely removed) as they swim by in a shallow pool. They'll be more receptive to your petting if you're ready to fork out $4 to feed them plates of fish.

For park hours, prices, and FASTPASS information, see "Theme park practicalities" in Essentials.

Aquatica

Seaworld Orlando's new water park, Aquatica, is opening in 2008. The park is located near Seaworld, on International Drive south of Sea Harbor Drive, and when it opens will combines live animal attractions with wave pools, water slides, and sandy beaches, all set in 60 acres designed to evoke a South Seas feel. Two enclosed water tubes will send you coursing through a dolphin lagoon.

For more information, call ☎407/351-3600 or 1-800/327-2424, or visit Ⓦwww.aquaticabyseaworld.com.

▲ DOLPHIN COVE

Dolphin Cove and Dolphin Nursery

SeaWorld. Four-dollar plates of fish are also handy at the interactive Dolphin Cove, where playful dolphins let themselves be stroked while gliding along the sides of a large pool on the prowl for their next snack. The nearby Dolphin Nursery is a more tranquil setting where barriers around the pool prevent people from petting the calves kept here – the fruit of SeaWorld's dolphin-breeding program.

Manatee Rescue

SeaWorld. Don't miss the chance to get a close-quarters look at these imposing, lettuce-munching mammals, which can sometimes grow to thirteen feet and a whopping 3500 pounds. Manatees are endangered in Florida's waters primarily by accidents with boats and man-made pollution. The initial viewing is from an outside walkway, but you can get better, underwater views by entering the complex itself, where a short film about the manatee's modern-day plight is also shown. All of the manatees here were rescued by SeaWorld's animal rescue team, and this attraction doubles as the world's largest manatee rehabilitation facility.

Journey to Atlantis SeaWorld.

Minimum height: 42"/107cm. The park's first thrill ride is billed as a "water coaster" by virtue of the fact that you travel on both water and rails, but it never

▼ JOURNEY TO ATLANTIS

Insider tip

SeaWorld Orlando lacks any FASTPASS-style scheme; then again, it also lacks the kind of attractions that involve long waiting lines. **Kraken**, **Journey to Atlantis**, and the flight-simulator ride at **Wild Arctic** are the only times when you'll have to wait to experience an attraction. The best tactic, then, is to go on these rides during one of the hugely popular live-animal shows, when the number of people milling about the park can be significantly reduced.

really lives up to the hype. The "coaster" part of the ride is neither fast nor exciting, and the only notable moment is one sheer drop that will soak everyone in the front row. Upon exiting the ride, take a few minutes to look at the two aquariums in the adjacent gift shop: one underfoot with stingrays, the other overhead with hammerhead sharks.

Kraken

SeaWorld. Minimum height: 54"/137cm. Traveling at break-neck speeds of up to 65mph on seven loop-the-loops that go as high as a fifteen-story building, your legs dangling precariously in midair throughout, this ride is fast and scary enough to make it a candidate for Orlando's best rollercoaster. Enjoy the bird's-eye views as the coaster climbs to its starting point high above the park, since for the rest of the time your eyes will be shut tight.

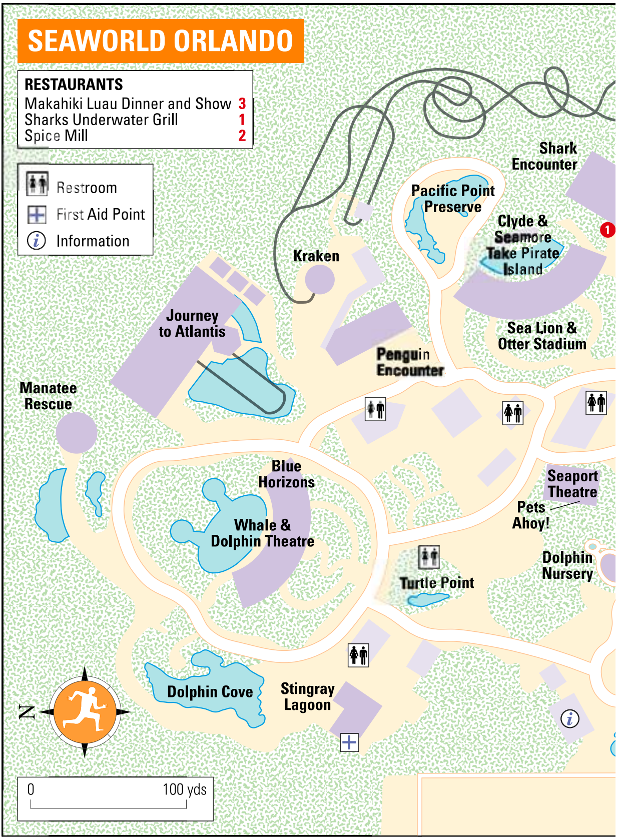
Pacific Point Preserve

SeaWorld. If you're going to invest $4 to buy a plate of fish to feed the animals, do it here. The California sea lions and harbor seals kept in this large tank complete with the rocks and grottoes of their native Pacific coastline do the most to earn their dinner, posing on rocks until you decide to toss them a morsel, which they catch in their mouths with great dexterity. Underwater viewing also allows you to witness their speed and agility closer up.

Penguin Encounter

SeaWorld. Whether they're waddling around on land, slipping on the ice and knocking each other over, or darting through the water like bulbous black arrows, the peculiar mannerisms of penguins are excellent fun to watch. Four different species – king, gentoo, chinstrap, and rockhopper – can be viewed here (along with puffins) as they cavort around an Antarctic environment devised with great attention to detail – right down to being more dimly lit in summer to mimic light conditions in the South Pole at that time of year.

▼ PENGUIN ENCOUNTER


SEAWORLD ORLANDO
RESTAURANTS
Makahiki Luau Dinner and Show 3
Sharks Underwater Grill 1
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Restroom
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Information
Shark Encounter
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Penguin Encounter
Manatee Rescue
Blue Horizons
Whale & Dolphin Theatre
Seaport Theatre
Pets Ahoy!
Dolphin Nursery
Turtle Point
Dolphin Cove
Stingray Lagoon
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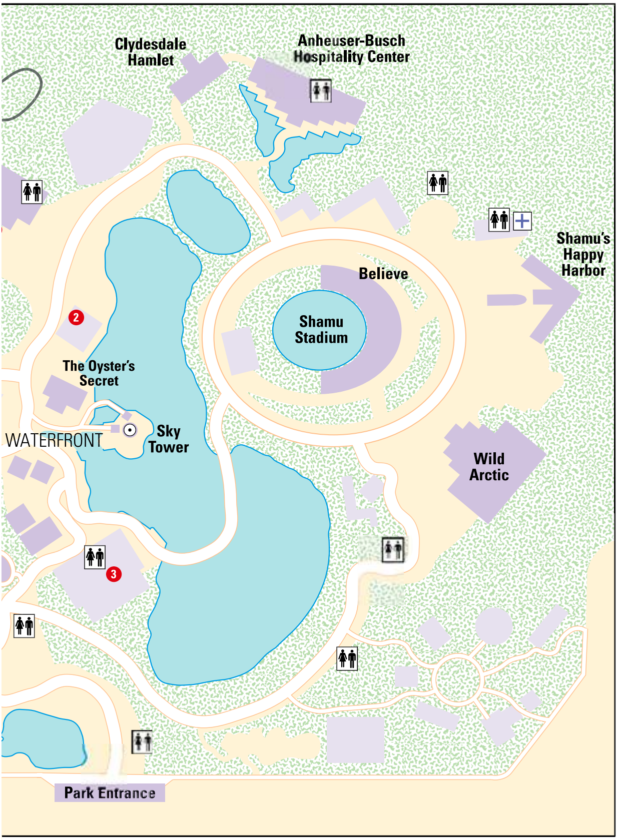
Shark Encounter

SeaWorld. Sinister music and cases of shark jaws serve as the prelude to a daunting walk through a 60-foot-long, acrylic-sided and -roofed tunnel where sharks swim around and above you, providing the rare chance to see how crammed full of teeth their mouths actually are – and offering as realistic an impression as you'll get on dry land of what swimming with sharks must feel like. The aquarium is also home to other notorious predators, including barracuda, eels, and poisonous fish. If you want to get closer still, you can don special equipment that allows you to

▼ SHARK ENCOUNTER


Clydesdale Hamlet
Anheuser-Busch Hospitality Center
Shamu's Happy Harbor
Believe
Shamu Stadium
2
The Oyster's Secret
WATERFRONT
Sky Tower
Wild Arctic
3
Park Entrance

breathe underwater without using scuba gear and go down in a shark cage as part of the Sharks Deep Dive program ($150; for reservations, call ☎1-800/327-2424).

Wild Arctic

SeaWorld. Minimum height: 42"/107cm. Artificial snow and ice make the beluga whales, walruses, and polar bears here feel right at home. You can get to the animal viewing area quickly by walking, but if you have the time you should wait in line to board your "helicopter" for a bumpy but enjoyable flight-simulator ride through an Arctic blizzard to the remote Base Station Wild Arctic – a re-creation of an Arctic research station that puts the animals nicely into context.

Anheuser-Busch Hospitality Center

SeaWorld. This small but bustling corner of the park is where free glasses of Anheuser-Busch beer are dispensed. The freebie is officially limited to two glasses per person, but this quota is not enforced with much rigor.

▲ DOLPHIN LAGOON AT DISCOVERY COVE

Serving time ends at 8pm. Sign up in advance if you want to attend the popular 30-minute Brewmaster's Club (nine daily), where you'll sample malts, stouts, and lagers, and learn how to pair them with different foods.

The Waterfront

SeaWorld. This five-acre re-creation of a Mediterranean fishing village is the only part of SeaWorld that offers the type of themed environment found all over the Disney and Universal parks. The surroundings provide a natural home for the bulk of the park's restaurants and shops and make for a pleasant stroll. The Waterfront's only attraction as such is the 400-foot Sky Tower – looking vaguely like Seattle's Space Needle – that soars over the lagoon and, along with the hulking steel frame of Kraken, is SeaWorld's most identifiable landmark. You can ascend the tower in rotating capsules for panoramic views over Orlando, although be prepared to pay an additional charge of $3 for the privilege.

Other SeaWorld attractions

The rest of the park is filled with more understated animal displays, which are nonetheless worth checking out if you have time: **Turtle Point** showcases endangered sea turtles, while the rather incongruous **Clydesdale Hamlet** houses beautiful Clydesdale horses (the Anheuser-Busch company symbol). The area set aside for kids, **Shamu's Happy Harbor**, rivals (if not surpasses) those at other theme parks, with the standard climbing nets, sandpit, inner tubes, and slides combining with slightly more challenging equipment such as remote-control boats and cars.

Discovery Cove

Apart from the dolphin encounter, there's not much else to Discovery Cove, so unless you're a passionate lover of these gentle creatures – and prepared to pay the extra charge

For park hours and prices, see "Theme park practicalities" in Essentials.

that meeting the dolphins involves – it may feel like a bit of a rip-off. On the other hand, since visitors are limited to no more than 1000 per day, there are no crowds. All equipment – wet suits, snorkeling gear, towels, lockers, animal-friendly sunscreen – is included in the admission price, as is lunch.

Assuming that you've opted to include the dolphin encounter, you'll be given a time for your rendezvous upon entering the park Although described as a "dolphin swim", it's best to immediately dispel any romantic images that this terminology inevitably evokes – the reality of the experience can be a little disappointing if you don't. You never actually "swim" with the dolphins, but although you're now dealing with a bottlenose dolphin rather than a guy in a Mickey Mouse costume, the general theme park approach is the same: you must have fun at all costs.

Before going anywhere near the dolphin, you'll watch an engaging video explaining their basic characteristics and how to use hand signals to communicate with them. After this, put on your wet suit and make your way to the icy waters of the **Dolphin Lagoon**. For the next thirty minutes or so you and six to eight other guests stand waist-deep in the water surrounding the dolphin and its trainer. You'll be encouraged to stroke the docile creature, give it kisses and hugs, and finally grasp its dorsal fin for a brief jaunt across the lagoon.

With the dolphin swim taking a relatively small chunk out of the day, there's plenty of time (in many ways, *too* much time) to explore other parts of the park. Most of this time can be spent alternating between sunbathing on the beach that unfolds in the center of the park and snorkeling in two pools jam-packed with fish.

In the **Coral Reef** thousands of tropical fish weave in and out of shipwrecked remains, while sharks and barracuda leer at you from behind protective glass screens. You can also snorkel or wade in the shallower **Ray Lagoon**, stroking dozens of harmless Southern and Cownose rays.

The **Tropical River** that winds around the Coral Reef, Ray Lagoon, and past the beach, is attractive enough, although in essence all it really offers is the chance to take a leisurely swim. Passing under the river's waterfalls, either by swimming, wading, or on inflatable rings, brings you to the jungle-like **Aviary**, where you can stroll freely amongst over thirty species of bird, including Scarlet Ibis and toucan, all of which wander about unconstrained by cages looking for an outstretched hand full of food to perch on.

Live shows

Believe

SeaWorld, Shamu Stadium. This new version of SeaWorld's signature killer whale show, The Shamu Adventure, has retained its crowd-pleasing elements – the mammals still look very impressive shooting their trainers high up in the air with their noses, and still take great delight in splashing the crowd with their tails (avoid the first fourteen rows if you don't want to get drenched). However, the new, Hollywood-style storyline of how being

▲ BELIEVE

a killer whale trainer is a dream job is taken a little too far, distracting our attention from the star performers and letting it wander, regrettably, to the mundane jobs awaiting us once our Orlando vacation is over.

Blue Horizons

SeaWorld, Whale & Dolphin Theatre. The park's obligatory dolphin show features many of the tricks that you'll have seen in Believe. However, with their greater speed and mobility, dolphins have more range than killer whales, and the show benefits as a result. Additional performances by trapeze artists, high divers, and even parrots give the show a welcome change of pace.

Clyde & Seamore Take Pirate Island

SeaWorld, Sea Lion & Otter Stadium. The storyline of this pantomime-style pirate adventure is aimed at the younger ones, but the superbly trained sea lions will impress everyone. Get there about fifteen minutes early to catch the hilarious mime artist who makes fun of arriving spectators with a blatant disregard for political correctness.

Insider tip

You'll miss some of the high diving routines at Blue Horizons if you sit too high up in the stadium.

Pets Ahoy!

SeaWorld, Seaport Theatre. A delightful show where cats and dogs, many of which have been rescued from local shelters, along with a variety of other more-or-less domesticated animals such as rats and pigs, perform a multitude of very cute routines.

Shops

The Oyster's Secret

SeaWorld, The Waterfront. Ask a diver to retrieve an oyster from the adjacent pearl diving lagoon, and then watch the pearl being removed and turned into the piece of jewelry of your choice.

Restaurants

Makahiki Luau Dinner and Show

SeaWorld, The Waterfront, Seafire Inn ☎ 1-800/327-2420. Adults $45.95, children 3–9 $29.95; discounts if you book online. A captivating Polynesian–style dinner show where the rhythmic music, traditional dance, and beautiful costumes all outshine the average Hawaiian and Pacific Rim food, including such dubious dishes as mahi-mahi in piña colada sauce.

Sharks Underwater Grill

SeaWorld, Shark Encounter. Strangely, this restaurant where you eat facing a glass wall through which sharks look jealously at your meal features no shark dishes on its seafood-dominated menu. Instead, the fare is salmon, shrimp, tuna, snapper, and scallops, with a few steaks thrown in for good measure. Main dishes cost $20–25. Reservations (which are recommended) are taken in person only.

Spice Mill

SeaWorld, The Waterfront. Claiming to feature “the flavors of the seven seas,” this eatery overlooking the lagoon does indeed offer more exotic choices than you’d usually find at theme-park restaurants. Cajun jambalaya ($9.95) and Caribbean jerk chicken sandwiches ($8) are among the more adventurous options; beer battered fish sandwiches ($8) are a safer bet for more sensitive palates.

▲ SHARKS UNDERWATER GRILL

International Drive and around

Once finished with the theme parks, the impulse of many visitors is to spend the rest of their stay experiencing the garish and much-publicized pleasures of International Drive (I-Drive for short), which, although tacky and predictable, can at least be toured on foot. Between the Prime Outlets International shopping mall at its northern end and the immense Orange County Convention Center in the south, there are numerous gift shops – all claiming to be the "world's largest" – and chain restaurants and hotels, interspersed by the odd diverting attraction, from large-scale operations such as the Wet 'n' Wild water park to a quirky museum. Nearby, Orlando's most eccentric theme park attempts to make religion fun, while just off I-Drive on Sand Lake Road, several trendy restaurants are clustered around the intersection with Dr. Philips Boulevard in an area known locally as "restaurant row."

Wet 'n' Wild

6200 International Drive ☎407/351-1800 or 1-800/992-9453, Ⓦwww.wetnwildorlando.com. Daily 10am–5pm, longer hours in summer. Adults $38.95, children 3–9 $32.95, $10 off regular prices after 2pm. Orlando's original water park has stood the test of time very well indeed and continues to offer stiff competition to Disney's Blizzard Beach and Typhoon Lagoon. Unfettered by Disney's predilection for fantastical themes, Wet 'n' Wild has put all of its energy into providing the most fun and exciting attractions possible. There are very scary, no-nonsense speed slides such as the 250-foot **Der Stuka** or the nearly vertical **The Bomb Bay**; more elaborate but slightly less intimidating flume and tube rides like the twisting **Mach 5** and **The Storm**, which feels rather like being flushed down the toilet; and multi-person raft rides such as **The Flyer**, with plenty of sharp turns, and **Disco H2O**, where your raft swirls in rhythm to 1970s disco music. Although much

New development

The prime site smack in the middle of I-Drive once occupied by The Mercado complex is being transformed into The Square, which will also offer shopping and entertainment, with a sixteen-story hotel as the focal point. The hotel won't be finished until 2010, but you may find a few shops opening during 2008. For more information, visit Ⓦwww.thesquareorlando.com.

Sky Venture

▲ SKY VENTURE

more compact than either of the Disney water parks, there are still some attractive areas for general lounging about and swimming, notably the Beach Club, which includes a place for picnics (you can bring food, but no alcohol, into the park); and the water is heated during the colder months.

Sky Venture

6805 Visitor's Circle, across from Wet 'n' Wild ☎ 407/903-1150 or 1-800/759-3861, Ⓦ www.skyventureorlando.com. Sun–Thurs 11.30am–9pm (closed Wed in Oct), Fri & Sat 11.30am–10pm. Adults $44.95, children 3–12 $33.95. Fly on a column of air without a parachute in this realistic freefall skydiving simulator. The whole process lasts about an hour, and includes a basic flight training class and putting on the skydiving gear. The flight itself, which takes place in an indoor wind tunnel, lasts for only a couple of minutes or so, but it's an exhilarating experience. Although you can turn up on spec and get a flight, reserving in advance is recommended.

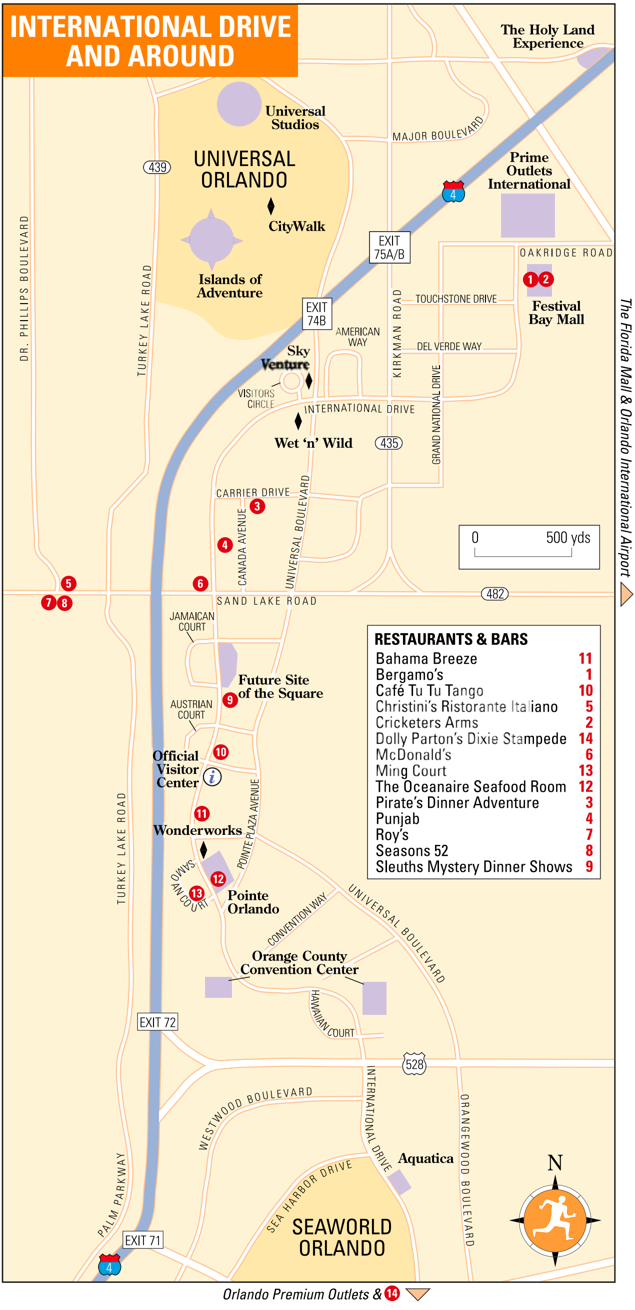
Pointe Orlando

9101 International Drive ☎ 407/248-2838, Ⓦ www.pointeorlando.com. With the disappearance of The Mercado (see box, opposite), The Pointe is currently I-Drive's most conveniently located entertainment center. Close to the Orange County Convention Center (see p.127), many of the businesses found here – including clothing stores such as AIX Armani Exchange and Victoria's Secret, several restaurants, and a 21-screen multi-screen cinema showing the latest Hollywood releases – cater to the convention crowd.

▼ POINTE ORLANDO

Maggiano's
Pointe Orlando

INTERNATIONAL DRIVE AND AROUND


The Holy Land Experience
Universal Studios
UNIVERSAL ORLANDO
CityWalk
Islands of Adventure
439
MAJOR BOULEVARD
Prime Outlets International
4
EXIT 75A/B
OAKRIDGE ROAD
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Festival Bay Mall
TOUCHSTONE DRIVE
DEL VERDE WAY
EXIT 74B
AMERICAN WAY
KIRKMAN ROAD
GRAND NATIONAL DRIVE
DR. PHILLIPS BOULEVARD
TURKEY LAKE ROAD
Sky Venture
VISITORS CIRCLE
INTERNATIONAL DRIVE
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SAND LAKE ROAD
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JAMAICAN COURT
Future Site of the Square
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AUSTRIAN COURT
Official Visitor Center
10
11
Wonderworks
POINTE PLAZA AVENUE
SAMOAN COURT
12
13
Pointe Orlando
CONVENTION WAY
UNIVERSAL BOULEVARD
Orange County Convention Center
HAWAIIAN COURT
EXIT 72
528
WESTWOOD BOULEVARD
INTERNATIONAL DRIVE
ORANGEWOOD BOULEVARD
Aquatica
SEA HARBOR DRIVE
SEAWORLD ORLANDO
PALM PARKWAY
EXIT 71
4
N
Orlando Premium Outlets & 14

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Bergamo's	1
Café Tu Tu Tango	10
Christini's Ristorante Italiano	5
Cricketers Arms	2
Dolly Parton's Dixie Stampede	14
McDonald's	6
Ming Court	13
The Oceanaire Seafood Room	12
Pirate's Dinner Adventure	3
Punjab	4
Roy's	7
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Sleuths Mystery Dinner Shows	9

▲ ORANGE COUNTY CONVENTION CENTER

Even so, the place never really gets busy enough to make it exciting, and businesses open and close with too much frequency to suggest that this is a compelling destination in its own right.

Wonderworks

Pointe Orlando, 9067 International Drive ☎ 407/351-8800, Ⓦ www.wonderworksonline.com. Daily 9am–midnight. Adults $19.95, children 4–12 $14.95. This collection of more than one hundred high-tech interactive gizmos is cleverly housed inside an upside-down creaking house. Many of the exhibits rely on simulators to re-create various exciting situations: some such as landing the space shuttle and flying a fighter jet require a certain amount of hand-eye coordination and concentration; others such as the simulated earthquake and virtual rollercoaster let you just sit back and enjoy the experience. Quirkier contraptions include one where you get to feel what it's like to lie on a bed of 3500 nails. There's enough here to keep you interested for an hour or two, after which you can head to the basement (which is actually the "third floor" of this inverted house) to shoot laser guns at one another for an extra $4.95. Perfect for teenage boys.

Orange County Convention Center

9800 International Drive ☎ 407/685-9800, Ⓦ www.occc.net. As well as being a major tourist destination, Orlando rakes in plenty of dollars from a convention business that rivals that of Las Vegas. The huge Orange County Convention Center is the second largest convention center in the US and marks the southern extremity of the pedestrian-friendly part of International Drive; beyond this, there are no sidewalks. Consisting of the West

▼ WONDERWORKS

Pointe
ORLANDO

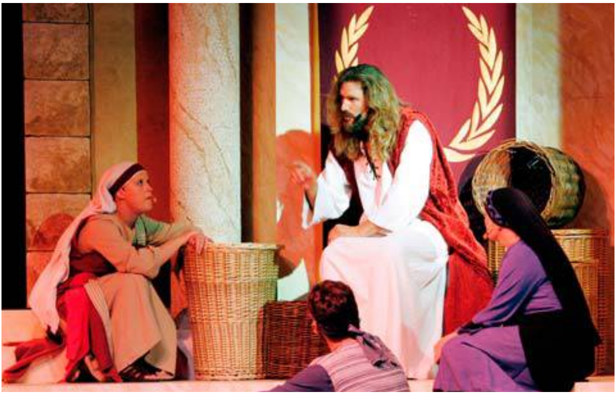
Building and the more recent, futuristic North/South Building, the center is at its busiest in January and February, when two of the largest conventions are the PGA Merchandise Show (golf equipment; not open to the general public) and The International Builders' Show (home builders).

Festival Bay Mall

5250 International Drive ⓣ407/351-7718, ⓦwww.shopfestivalbaymall.com. Right at the northern end of I-Drive, this shopping mall and entertainment complex, with a few restaurants thrown in for good measure, feels a bit out of the way. Although served by the I-Ride Trolley (see p.177), its specialty shops dealing in surfing gear, fishing equipment, and the like, a 20-screen cinema, and glow-in-the-dark mini-golf are only worth a look if you happen to be up this way shopping at the nearby Prime Outlets International mall (see opposite). The opening of a Ron Jon Surfpark in 2008 will be a welcome addition, offering surfers the chance to test their skills in three wave pools which, unlike those at the water parks, are devoted entirely to them.

The Holy Land Experience

4655 Vineland Rd at Conroy Rd, next to the I-4 (exit 78) ⓣ407/872-2272 or 1-800/447-7235, ⓦwww.theholylandexperience.com. Mon–Sat 10am–6pm (occasionally closes at 9pm on a few days during holiday times). Adults $35, children 6–12 $23. Orlando's newest theme park opened in 2001 with the slightly controversial publicity that was bound to follow a project that deals with religious themes in the most secular of ways. This said, don't expect Noah's Ark flume rides or David vs Goliath rollercoasters. The park's primary aim is to educate – and to preach – the Christian message. This is done largely through the park's architecture – such as an evocative re-building of ancient Jerusalem – various exhibits on the history of religion, including a re-creation of the tabernacle, and the telling of pivotal events during Jesus' lifetime in films and live performances. The topics chosen for performance are diverse in scope and widely recognizable, with the signature show being a musical presentation of the crucifixion. The park covers a mere fifteen



▲ THE HOLY LAND EXPERIENCE

acres (Disney's Magic Kingdom, for example, is 107 acres) so you can easily see it in a few hours.

Shops

Prime Outlets International

4951 International Drive ⓣ407/352-9600, ⓦwww.primeoutlets.com. Shop for some good deals on well-known brands (including GAP, Levis, DKNY, Guess, and Calvin Klein) at one of Orlando's largest factory outlet shopping malls. Construction work at the time of writing will lead to an even greater choice of shops by the spring of 2008. The mall is the last stop on the northbound I-Ride Trolley.

The Florida Mall

8001 S Orange Blossom Trail, at Sand Lake Rd, about five miles east of I-Drive ⓣ407/851-6255. This is Orlando's largest regular shopping center – not a factory outlet mall – so expect to pay retail prices at JCPenny, Saks Fifth Avenue, Sears, and many smaller specialty shops selling everything from clothes, jewelry, and home furnishings to cosmetics, toys, and chocolates.

Orlando Premium Outlets

8200 Vineland Ave ⓣ407/238-7787, ⓦwww.premiumoutlets.com. Right at the southern end of I-Drive (the last stop on the southbound I-Ride Trolley), this mall specializes in designer-label clothes at much reduced prices (although they remain pricey by normal standards). Practically all of the major names are here, including Hugo Boss, Giorgio Armani, and Max Mara, as well as the main sports-equipment retailers.

Restaurants

Bergamo's

Festival Bay Mall, 5250 International Drive ⓣ407/352-3805, ⓦwww.bergamos.com. Dinner only. Authentic Italian food, from starters ($7–12) of tasty antipasti to main courses ($20–30) such as *osso buco* (braised veal shanks), served by singing waiters who perform Broadway hits, opera, and Neapolitan folk songs while you eat.

Café Tu Tu Tango

8625 International Drive ⓣ407/248-2222, ⓦwww.cafetututango.com. While offering original and imaginative dishes (mainly $7–11) such as cilantro-lime scallops and alligator bites, the portions are so small (more like tapas, really) that two or three are required to fill you up. All the artwork on the walls is for sale.

Christini's Ristorante Italiano

7600 Dr. Phillips Blvd ⓣ407/345-8770, ⓦwww.christinis.com. Dinner only. One of Orlando's best Italian restaurants, where the food, wine, and service are all impeccable, and the decor upscale and elegant. Pasta dishes (such as linguini in red or white

▼ CAFÉ TU TU TANGO

clam sauce) cost around $20, while the meat and seafood dishes, including several different veal options, are $30 and up.

Cricketers Arms

Festival Bay Mall, 5250 International Drive ⓣ 407/354-0686, ⓦ www.cricketersarmspub.com. The fish and chips ($8.95–13.95), cottage pies ($9.95), and other British favorites served here make for a tasty and relatively economical choice for lunch or dinner.

Dolly Parton's Dixie Stampede

8251 Vineland Ave, next to Orlando Premium Outlets ⓣ 407/238-7777 or 1-866/443-4943, ⓦ www.dixiestampede.com. Adults $49.99, children 3–11 $21.99. Right at the southern end of I-Drive (the last stop on the southbound I-Ride Trolley), this energetic dinner show features some impressive stunts on horseback, presented with more panache than the Dolly Parton theme might suggest. The simply prepared whole roasted chicken makes for a satisfying dinner.

▲ DOLLY PARTON'S DIXIE STAMPEDE

McDonald's

6875 W Sand Lake Rd ⓣ 407/351-2185, ⓦ www.mcfun.com. This is the largest "entertainment" *McDonald's* in the world – meaning that there's more for kids (and adults) to do here than just munch burgers: video games, climbing frames, and pinball machines clutter two floors, while appetizing and good-value paninis and pasta dishes for around $6 provide an excellent and healthier alternative to the hamburgers, fries, and other usual fare on the menu.

Ming Court

9188 International Drive ⓣ 407/351-9988, ⓦ www.ming-court.com. Asian cuisine of an exceptionally high standard and made with only the freshest ingredients. Most dishes cost around $15 – good value considering the quality of the food and the beautiful decor. Try the meticulously prepared dim sum medley ($6.95) as a starter or a sumptuous sushi platter (around $25) for a main course.

The Oceanaire Seafood Room

Pointe Orlando, 9101 International Drive ⓣ 407/363-4801, ⓦ www.theoceanaire.com. Dinner only. A really good selection of seafood – from scampi and scallops to halibut and monkfish – prepared in a variety of ways. There's also an oyster bar. Popular with convention-goers on expense accounts, since main dishes are expensive at $25–35.

Pirate's Dinner Adventure

6400 Carrier Drive ⓣ 407/248-0590 or 1-800/866-2469, ⓦ www.piratesdinneradventure.com. Adults $55.95, children 3–11 $35.95; discounts if you book online. Peg-leg buccaneers, scalawags, cannons, sword fights, and a

▲ MING COURT

host of stunts and songs are all part of a Broadway-style show performed on a pirate's galleon while you eat a rather less inspiring meal of chicken in lemon-pepper sauce, pork tenderloin, rice, and vegetables.

Punjab

7451 International Drive ☎ 407/352-7887, ⓦ www.punjabindianrestaurant.com. The flavorsome and moderately spicy curries (around $15) at this unpretentious Indian restaurant are popular with Orlando's East Asian community – a good sign of its quality.

Roy's

7760 W Sand Lake Rd ☎ 407/352-4844, ⓦ www.roysrestaurant.com. Dinner only. Hawaiian chain offering an innovative island-fusion cuisine. Try the fixed-price, three-course menu ($35) for a good and relatively inexpensive sampling of what's on offer; main dishes include mahi-mahi in lobster-butter sauce and hibachi grilled salmon.

Seasons 52

7700 W Sand Lake Rd ☎ 407/354-5212, ⓦ www.seasons52.com. All items on the menu are less than 475 calories, a feat achieved by using plenty of chicken, fish, and vegetables rather than skimping on quantity. The desserts, meanwhile, come in "four-bite" portions. Most main dishes cost around $15. There are tables outside overlooking a lake, while the busy piano bar (see p.132) is the focal point inside.

Sleuths Mystery Dinner Shows

8267 International Drive ☎ 407/363-1985 or 1-800/393-1945, ⓦ www.sleuths.com. Adults $48.95, children 3–11 $23.95. Witness one of several whodunits (they alternate every week) acted out reasonably well and with plenty of audience interaction. The copious roast hen dinner and, especially, the generous servings of beer and wine help proceedings along nicely.

Insider tip

The communal seating arrangements at the Sleuths Mystery Dinner Shows, with nine or so seated around tables in a large dining room, provide lone diners with good opportunities for making friends.

▲ SEASONS 52

Bars

Bahama Breeze

8849 International Drive ☎ 407/248-2499, Ⓦ www.bahamabreeze.com. Primarily a restaurant serving decent Caribbean entrees for $15–20, this place comes into its own later in the evening (particularly on Fri and Sat), when crowds of thirty- and forty-somethings gather to sip cocktails, listen to live island-style music, and flirt.

Cricketers Arms

Festival Bay Mall, 5250 International Drive ☎ 407/354-0686, Ⓦ www.cricketersarmspub.com. A convivial place frequented by Anglo-Saxons homesick for warm beer and soccer matches, but also with a faithful clientele of Orlando locals. There's live music nightly covering an eclectic range of genres, usually commencing at around 10.30pm.

Seasons 52

7700 W Sand Lake Rd ☎ 407/354-5212, Ⓦ www.seasons52.com. This eatery on "restaurant row" is a popular place for single professionals on Wed, Fri, and Sat evenings, when the piano bar does a brisk trade in cocktails, appetizers, and cheesy chat-up lines.

Downtown Orlando

Orlando's sprawling and often unattractive layout is redeemed by its vibrant downtown, an area still largely ignored by visitors. City developers, on the other hand, have spent a lot of time and money in recent years on rejuvenating this part of the city: the trendy restaurants and luxurious condos are very much the new face of downtown Orlando. The real draw, however, is the robust and constantly changing nightlife. Orange Avenue in particular is lined with a bewildering number of bars, lounges, and clubs of every style imaginable, all of them easily visited on foot – as is most of the central downtown area. For further-flung attractions, a couple of which are located in Loch Haven Park, a large lawn wedged between two lakes three miles north of downtown, catch a Lynx bus from the main terminus on North Garland Avenue.

Orange Avenue

Downtown Orlando's main thoroughfare is Orange Avenue, which continues for a few miles north towards Winter Park (see p.140), with the most interesting, pedestrian-friendly stretch lying between South and Robinson streets. Trawled by lunch-seeking office workers by day, it becomes especially lively in the evenings as its numerous – and very eclectic – collection of bars, lounges, and nightclubs open for business. Sightseers won't find much to look at along this street: the late 1920s First National Bank (now Valencia Community College) is the only building with much architectural interest.

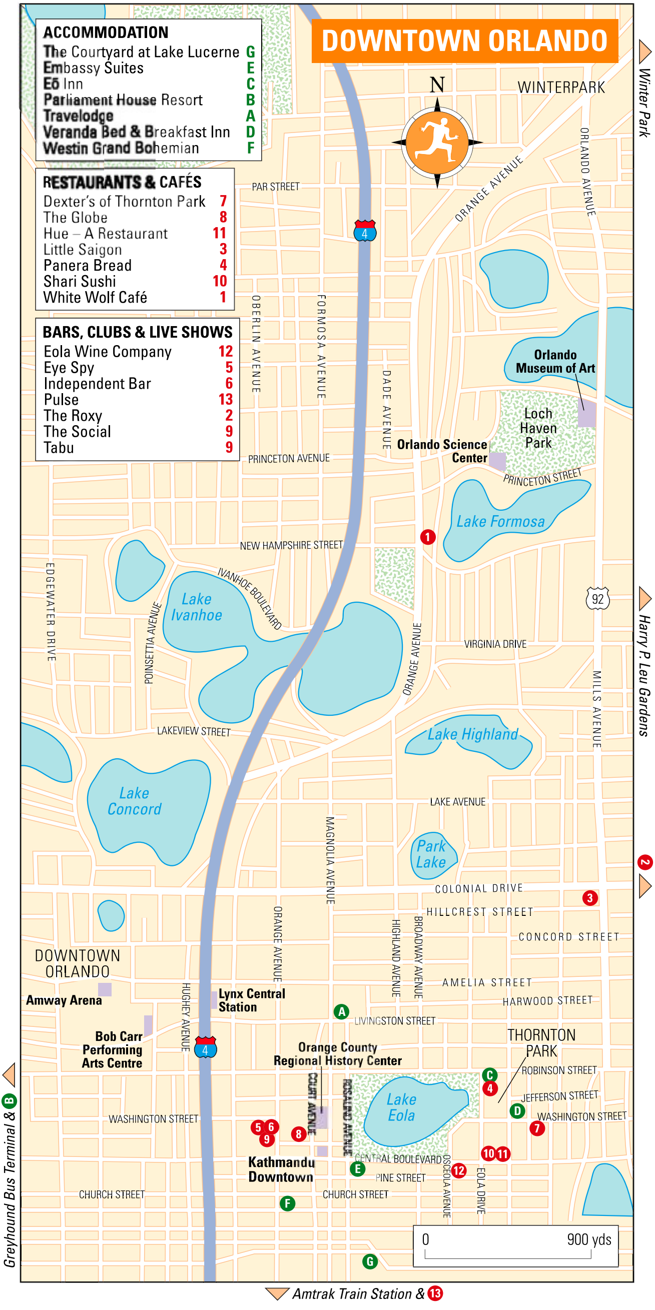
Lake Eola and Thornton Park

10-min walk east of Orange Ave.

Some of the wooden homes built by Orlando's first settlers in the mid-1800s stand next to fancy high-rise condos around

▲ FIRST NATIONAL BANK ON ORANGE AVENUE

DOWNTOWN ORLANDO



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WASHINGTON STREET
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OSCEOLA AVENUE
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▲ LAKE EOLA

scenic Lake Eola. A one-mile path skirts the lake and is a popular place for jogging and dog-walking, particularly at dusk. If you'd like to get on the lake itself, you can rent paddleboats that look like swans for a rather steep $12 per half-hour.

The several streets on the eastern side of the lake comprise Thornton Park, a trendy, upscale neighborhood. This showcase of downtown's new urbanism, full of renovated cottages, hip restaurants, and bustling coffee shops makes for a very pleasant stroll through what feels like a village within the city.

Orange County Regional History Center

65 E Central Blvd, one block east of Orange Ave ☎ 407/836-8500 or 1-800/965-2030, Ⓦ www.thehistorycenter.org. Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun noon–5pm. Adults $7, children 3–12 $3.50. This informative history museum is housed in the restored 1927 Orange County Courthouse on Heritage Square. For all its interactive exhibits tracing the area's history from 10,000 BC to the present day, the most intriguing displays are the old photos and re-creations of hotel lobbies, grocery stores, and the like that give a revealing glimpse of what Orlando looked and felt like before the arrival of Disney – much more the epitome of an American frontier town than the theme-park epicenter it is today.

Orlando Museum of Art

2416 N Mills Ave, Loch Haven Park ☎ 407/896-4231, Ⓦ www.omart.org. Tues–Fri 10am–4pm, Sat & Sun noon–4pm. Adults $8, children 6–18 $5. The permanent collection of Orlando's small but well-presented art museum focuses on American art from the nineteenth century to the present day – an eclectic mix of works that range from the bright and cheerful impressionist paintings of Edward Henry Potthast to an enigmatic 50-foot woodcut by African-American artist Kerry James Marshall – as well as artifacts from ancient America (2000 BC to 1521 AD) and Africa. Just as enthralling are the excellent temporary exhibitions (around ten to twelve a year) that showcase art forms by artists from both the US and abroad.

Orlando Science Center

777 E Princeton St, Loch Haven Park ⓣ407/514-2000 or 1-888/672-4386, ⓦwww.osc.org. Sun–Thurs 10am–6pm, Fri & Sat 10am–9pm. Adults $14.95, children 3–11 $9.95. While virtually devoid of tourists, this all-embracing science center opposite the Orlando Museum of Art is by no means empty. It's the day-trip of choice for almost every school in the Greater Orlando area, and therefore touring this multi-level facility can be an exercise in patience. The crowds, however, are absorbed quite well over the four floors, where the plentiful interactive exhibits do a reasonable job of making astronomy, biology, energy sources, and physics more palatable to formative – but wandering – minds. The main draw for adults is the CineDome, the world's largest Iwerks domed theater and Digistar II planetarium, where documentary-style films (included in the ticket price) about natural phenomena or equally photogenic subjects such as the mummies of ancient Egypt or dinosaurs are shown daily.

Harry P. Leu Gardens

1920 N Forest Ave, one mile east of Loch Haven Park ⓣ407/246-2620, ⓦwww.leugardens.org. Daily 9am–5pm. Adults $5, children 3–12 $1. These lush, fifty-acre botanical gardens were purchased by a green-thumbed Orlando businessman in 1936 to show off plants collected from around the world. After seeing and sniffing the roses, azaleas, and the largest collection of camellias in the US outside of California, take a trip around Leu House (guided tours only, Aug–June daily 10am–3.30pm, included in ticket price), a late nineteenth-century farmhouse bought and lived in by Leu and his wife, now maintained in the simple but elegant style of their time and laced with family mementos.

Live shows

Bob Carr Performing Arts Centre and Amway Arena

Less than a mile northwest of downtown, on the other side of the I-4 from the bus station. Orlando Opera ⓣ407/426-1700, ⓦwww.orlandoopera.org; tickets $25–250. Orlando Ballet ⓣ407/426-1739, ⓦwww.orlandoballet.org; tickets $18–65. These two large performance venues host the best that Orlando has to offer in the way of performing arts and professional sports. Notable institutions such as the Orlando Opera and the Orlando Ballet stage their four or five yearly productions at the Bob Carr Performing Arts Centre, while the city's only major league professional sports team, the Orlando Magic NBA basketball franchise, play their games at the Amway Arena opposite. The regular basketball season runs from Nov to April and tickets cost $10–115 (box office ⓣ407/896-2442 or 1-800/4NBA-TIX).

The Social

54 N Orange Ave ⓣ407/246-1419, ⓦwww.thesocial.org. One of the most important venues in Florida for showcasing the talents of bands – both with local and national followings – playing alternative rock, grunge, and anything else that isn't mainstream. Check the website for a full list of coming attractions.

Shopping

Kathmandu Downtown

23 S Court Ave ☎ 407/316-0026, Ⓦ www.tribalasia.com. Provided you can handle the intense wafts of incense, browsing the assorted ethnic paraphernalia here makes for a good break while bar hopping. Smokers can also stock up on natural, additive-free cigarettes. Open until 3am Mon to Sat, till midnight Sun. There's another branch in Winter Park, at 352 N Park Ave.

Restaurants and cafés

Dexter's of Thornton Park

808 E Washington St ☎ 407/648-2777, Ⓦ www.dexwine.com. This trendy yet informal eatery serves up substantial and imaginative sandwiches and salads for $7–12, while the more gourmet dinner dishes such as salmon with apple and leek confit and wild mushroom meatloaf are $15–25. There's another branch in Winter Park, at 558 W New England Ave (☎ 407/629-1150).

▲ KATHMANDU DOWNTOWN

The Globe

25 Wall St Plaza ☎ 407/849-9904. A good place for inexpensive Nouveau American snacks and light meals with an Asian twist, usually not costing more than around $10. The noodle bowls are a good choice, as is the chicken masala. There are some tables on the pedestrian-only street – perfect for people watching.

HUE – A Restaurant

629 E Central Blvd ☎ 407/849-1800, Ⓦ www.huerestaurant.com. Hip Thornton Park eatery, good for a cocktail at the bar or on the outside terrace if you

Dexter's
THORNTON PARK

▲ DEXTER'S OF THORNTON PARK

▲ EOLA WINE COMPANY

can't afford the pricey food – $21–36 for main courses, including wood-grilled meat and fish dishes with chive mashed potatoes – which is presented with plenty of style and panache, even if it does sometimes taste quite average.

Little Saigon

1106 E Colonial Drive ⓣ 407/423-8539, ⓦ www.littlesaigonrestaurant.com. One of the biggest and best of the many Vietnamese restaurants on Colonial Drive (near Mills Avenue), a couple of miles northeast of downtown. Most dishes cost around $6.

▼ PANERA BREAD

Panera
BREAD

Panera Bread

227 N Eola Drive ⓣ 407/481-1060, ⓦ www.panerabread.com. This popular local café chain offers a decent array of baked goods, soups, salads, and sandwiches (lunch will cost around $8), as well as the full gamut of coffee drinks. However, the main draws are the availability of free Wi-Fi Internet access and a great location facing Lake Eola.

Shari Sushi

621 E Central Blvd ⓣ 407/420-9420, ⓦ www.sharisushilounge.com. Dinner only. The decor is sleek and the clientele beautiful at this upscale restaurant specializing in fresh sushi made with conch, tuna, flying fish, and the like. Two or three pieces of nigiri or sashimi cost $3–8; sushi platters go for $15–49.

White Wolf Café

1829 N Orange Ave, near Loch Haven Park ⓣ 407/895-9911, ⓦ www.whitewolfcafe.com. Closed Sun. Most of the antique dealers who used to trade around here have gone, which has made this down-to-earth café (that also sells antiques) look a bit forlorn. However, the creative sandwiches (including several veggie options) and generous salads, all for under $10, are still popular with the faithful clientele.

Bars and clubs

Eola Wine Company

500 E Central Blvd ⓣ 407/481-9100, ⓦ www.eolawinecompany.com. Escape the noise and crowds at this refined, laid-back wine bar across from Lake Eola, where you can order by the glass or in "flights" (two-ounce servings of three or four

▲ TABU

different wines for $13–16). There's another branch in Winter Park, at 136 N Park Ave (☎407/647-9103).

Eye Spy

14 W Washington St ☎407/246-1599. Closed Sun. Accessed via an easy-to-miss-entrance around the corner from the *Independent Bar* (see below), the cozy location of this venue belies its quite raucous, but good-natured, atmosphere on the weekends.

Independent Bar

70 N Orange Ave ☎407/839-0457, Ⓦwww.independentbar.net. One of Orange Avenue's longest-standing bars is a dark and dingy gathering place for the alternative crowd, including plenty of Goths who you'll find moping around the adjoining nightclub listening to melancholic tunes from the 80s.

Pulse

1912 S Orange Ave ☎407/649-3888, Ⓦwww.pulseorlando.com. Amazing lighting effects, great sound, and a steady stream of live entertainment, including cabaret performers, drag acts, comedians, and erotic dancers, have made this a popular nightspot amongst gays and lesbians.

Roxy

740 Benett Rd, just off Colonial Drive, a couple miles east of downtown ☎407/898-4004, Ⓦwww.roxyorlando.com. Closed Mon. This large, two-level dance club is invariably packed with lovers of hip-hop, which is played on most nights, though each has a different theme. Check the website for dress codes, drink specials, and for nights when those over 18 are admitted. A large video screen overlooking the dance floor and sexy staff dancers egg on the crowd.

Tabu

46 N Orange Ave ☎407/648-8363, Ⓦwww.tabunightclub.com. Occupying an old theater, this dance club has great potential. However, the scruffy students who like to come here for Tuesday's and Thursday's cheap "all-u-can-drink" promotions, along with the bland commercial dance music, hardly do the surroundings much justice.

The northern suburbs

In sharp contrast to the institutionalized atmosphere of theme-park Orlando, three small towns to the north of the city offer their own singular character. Winter Park, about five miles northeast of downtown Orlando, is a well-to-do burg where the combination of old wealth and new yuppie dollars has brought about an aura of unpretentious refinement, evident in its impressive array of museums and boutique-style stores. An incredibly strong sense of community pervades nearby Eatonville, just to the east of Winter Park, which, in 1875, became the first incorporated African-American municipality in the US; it remains an important center of Black culture. While Winter Park and Eatonville are both good places to tour on foot, Maitland, directly north of Winter Park, is criss-crossed by larger streets that are less pleasant to walk along – you're better off having a car to visit the worthwhile art center, museum, and bird sanctuary located here.

Park Avenue

Winter Park. Nowhere is Winter Park's upmarket status more apparent than along Park Avenue, the main north–south thoroughfare that dissects the town's small downtown. On its western side lies a shady park – the perfect foil for the chic boutiques and art galleries lining the other side of the street and for which Park Avenue has become justly famous. Along with the galleries, there's an inordinate number of beauty salons, stores selling shoes, jewelry, cigars, luxury dog accessories – in short, all that well-heeled residents could ever want. High prices make window shopping the best tactic here; while sitting at one of the several street terraces sipping a coffee or having a meal allows for some tremendous privileged-people watching.

▼ PARK AVENUE IN WINTER PARK

BEER & WINE
TIMOTHY'S gallery
WOW!

Charles Hosmer Morse Museum of American Art

445 N Park Ave, Winter Park ☎ 407/645-5311, ⓦ www.morsemuseum.org. Tues–Sat 9.30am–4pm, Sun 1–4pm; Nov–April Fri 9.30am–8pm. $3, children under 12 free. The stark white

▲ SCENIC BOAT TOUR

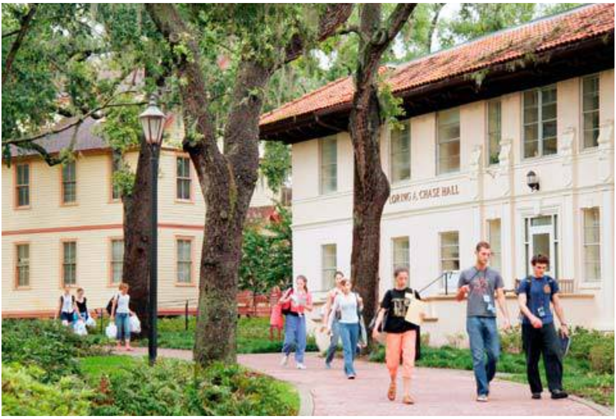
building on Park Avenue in the heart of Winter Park houses the collections of one of Winter Park's founding fathers. The major exhibits are drawn from the output of Louis Comfort Tiffany, legendary for his innovative Art Nouveau lamps and windows that furnished high-society homes around the turn of the last century. Great creativity and craftsmanship went into Tiffany's work: he molded glass while it was still soft, imbuing it with colored images of water lilies, leaves, and even strutting peacocks. The stunning leaded-glass windows are clearly the highlight of the collection, although such was the general caliber of Tiffany's work that the museum's other possessions, including paintings by Hermann Herzog and John Singer Sargent, pale in comparison.

Cornell Fine Arts Museum

1000 Holt Ave, Winter Park ☎ 407/646-2526, Ⓦ www.rollins.edu/cfam. Tues–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun 1–5pm. $5. On Fairbanks Avenue, which brings traffic from Loch Haven Park into Winter Park, stand the Mediterranean Revival buildings of **Rollins College**: the oldest college in the state, boasting a tiny but respected liberal-arts faculty. Other than its neat landscaping, the only reason to linger on campus (and then only briefly) is the **Cornell Fine Arts Museum,** with a permanent collection most notable for a few Italian Renaissance paintings (highlighted by Cosimo Rosselli's *Madonna and Child Enthroned*) mixed in with the staid bundle of modest nineteenth-century European and American works

Scenic boat tours

Five minutes east of Park Avenue, the shores of attractive **Lake Osceola** are lined with the opulent homes of Winter Park's wealthiest residents. Visitors can cruise this and some of Winter Park's other lakes on pontoon boats seating eighteen for hour-long narrated **tours** leaving from the dock at 312 E Morse Blvd in Winter Park (☎ 407/644-4056, Ⓦ www.scenicboattours.com). The "scenic" part of the tour is intended to focus primarily on the rich flora and fauna – including plenty of alligators – but it often takes a backseat to gawking enviously at how the other half lives. Departures are on the hour daily 10am–4pm. $10, children 2–11 $5.



▲ ROLLINS COLLEGE

by artists such as Louis Sonntag and Francesco de Mura. The temporary exhibitions are often more contemporary and vibrant. The college also hosts the annual Bach Festival (see p.181).

Albin Polasek Museum and Sculpture Gardens

633 Osceola Ave, Winter Park ☎ 407/647-6294, www.polasek.org. Sept–June Tues–Sat 10am–4pm, Sun 1–4pm. Gardens only: July & Aug Mon–Fri 10am–4pm. $5 (access to the gardens is free), children under 12 free. The former home of Czech-born Albin Polasek is now a showcase for his technically accomplished, realist sculpture. A woodcarver by profession, Polasek arrived penniless in the US in 1901, but, after having received a formal art training, spent much of the next fifty years winning big-money commissions, many of the profits from which have been plowed back into this museum. The beautiful three-acre gardens are the ideal place to view the liturgical, mythical, and classical sculptures, displayed to full effect against a backdrop of colorful flowers and plants.

Zora Neale Hurston National Museum of Fine Arts

227 E Kennedy Blvd, Eatonville ☎ 407/647-3131, www.zoranealehurstonfestival.com. Mon–Fri 9am–4pm, Sun 2–5pm. Donation suggested. Eatonville has strong connections with author Zora Neale Hurston, whose family moved here in the 1890s; the writer used the town as the setting for several of her novels, notably *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. The museum has some very basic rotating exhibits relating to some aspect or other of African-American life, but is really more of a starting point for a visit to this intriguing community, which takes great pride in its pioneering past (see p.181). Be sure to pick up the pamphlet *A Walking Tour of Eatonville, Florida* at the museum, which gives exhaustive historical explanations of every possible point of interest, all easily covered on foot in less than an hour. Of these, the Robert Hungerford Preparatory High School – the first school for African-Americans in Central Florida – and the eight-room

Hurston family house have the greatest historical appeal.

Maitland Art Center

231 W Packwood Ave, Maitland ⓣ407/539-2181, ⓦwww.maitlandartcenter.org. Mon–Fri 9am–4.30pm, Sat & Sun noon–4.30pm. Free (exhibitions $3). Comprised of 23 separate structures linked by gardens and courtyards and decorated with Aztec- and Maya-style murals, this art center's intriguing ensemble of buildings is the main reason for a visit. The permanent collection contains plenty of etchings, paintings, and sculpture by its founder, artist and architect Jules André Smith. Smith opened the center in the 1930s as the Research Studio, inviting other American artists such as Milton Avery and Doris Lee to spend working winters there. This tradition continues with the Artists-in-Action program, which allows visitors to observe professional artists at work in their studios at most times of the year. Several painters and sculptors have claimed to have felt the presence – and artistic guidance – of Smith's ghost during their sojourns here.

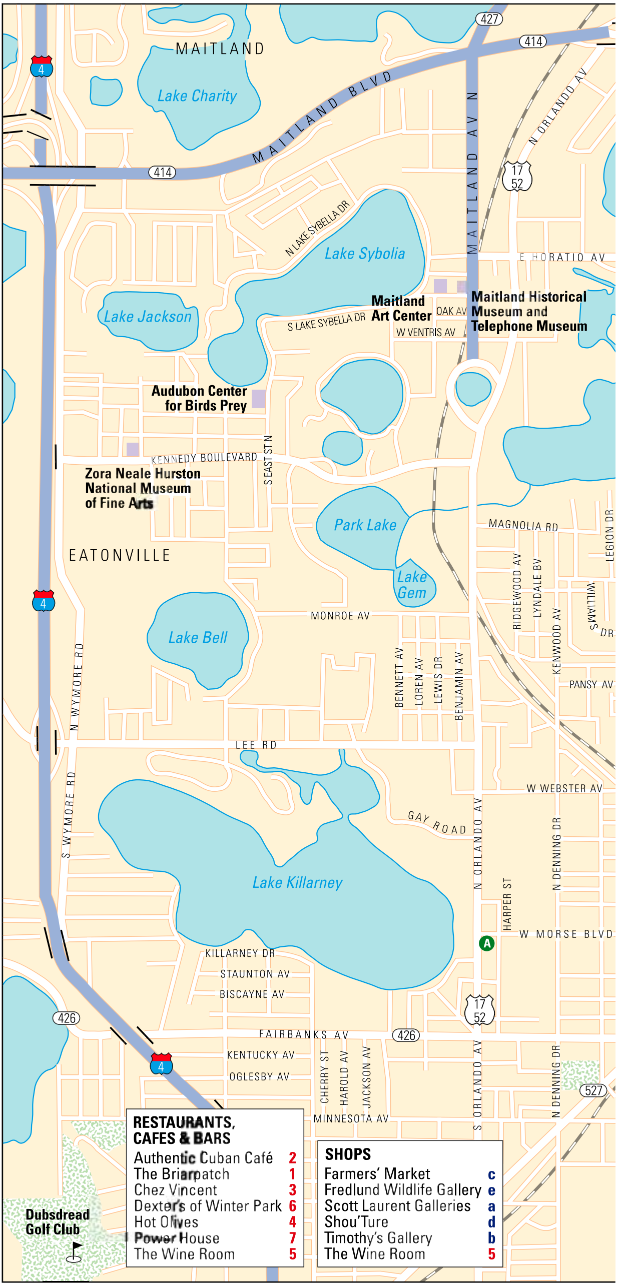
Maitland Historical Museum and Telephone Museum

221 W Packwood Ave, Maitland ⓣ407/644-2451, ⓦwww.maitlandhistory.com. Wed–Sun noon–4pm. $3. The front rooms of these combined museums host a collection of artifacts and old photographs, plus rotating exhibits, all with some bearing on Maitland life and not overly exciting unless you have a particular interest in the area. Much more fun can be had in the back room, which is filled with wonderful vintage phones, commemorating the day in 1910 when the son of a Maitland grocer installed telephones in the homes of his father's customers, enabling them to order groceries from the comfort of their armchairs. From such inauspicious beginnings, the Winter Park Telephone Company evolved.

Audubon Center for Birds of Prey

1101 Audubon Way, Maitland ⓣ407/644-0190, ⓦwww.audubonofflorida.org. Tues–Sun 10am–4pm. $5, children 3–12 $4. Run by the Florida Audubon Society, this is one of the leading raptor (birds of prey) rehabilitation facilities in the Southeast, treating over seven hundred injured and orphaned birds – including ospreys, owls, hawks, eagles, falcons, and the odd vulture – a year, returning over forty percent of them back to the wild. Though the public is not allowed to see the birds intended for release actually undergoing treatment, visitors can browse the several aviaries accommodating the birds with injuries so bad that returning them to the wild would be a certain death sentence.

▼ AUDUBON CENTER FOR BIRDS OF PREY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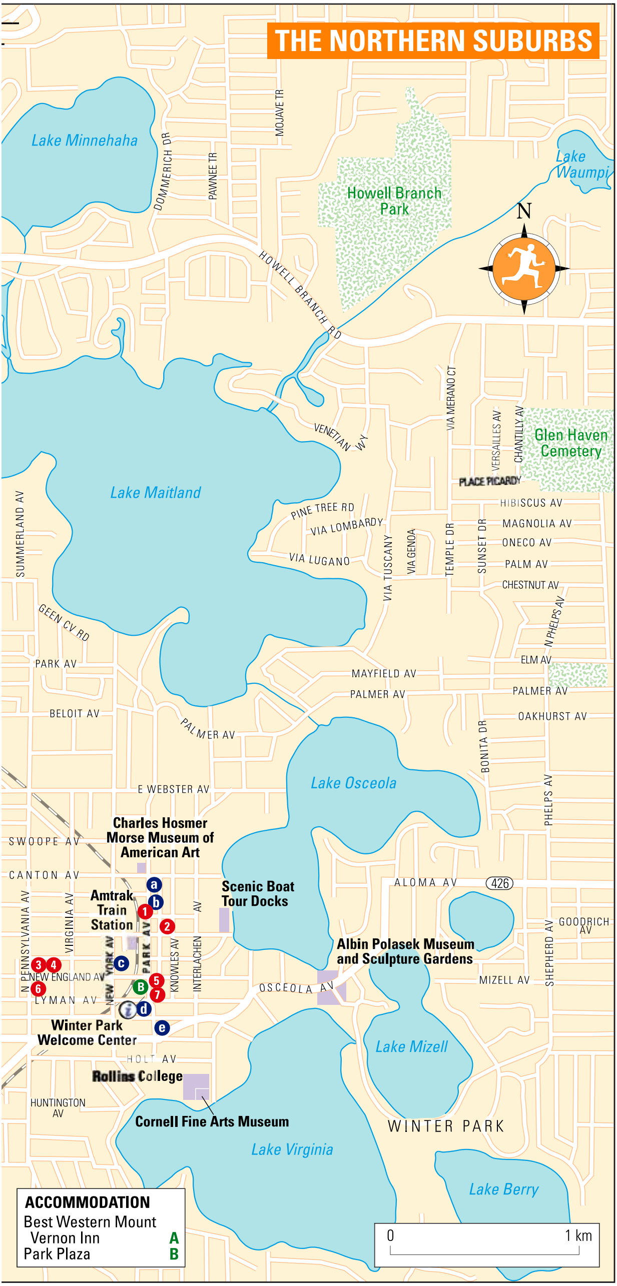
JACKSON AV
S ORLANDO AV
527
MINNESOTA AV
RESTAURANTS, CAFES & BARS
Authentic Cuban Café 2
The Briarpatch 1
Chez Vincent 3
Dexter's of Winter Park 6
Hot Olives 4
Power House 7
The Wine Room 5
SHOPS
Farmers' Market c
Fredlund Wildlife Gallery e
Scott Laurent Galleries a
Shou'Ture d
Timothy's Gallery b
The Wine Room 5
Dubsdread Golf Club

THE NORTHERN SUBURBS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CHANTILLY AV
Glen Haven Cemetery
PLACE PICARDY
HIBISCUS AV
MAGNOLIA AV
ONECO AV
PALM AV
CHESTNUT AV
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PARK AV
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INTERLACHEN AV
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GOODRICH AV
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ACCOMMODATION

Best Western Mount Vernon Inn	A
Park Plaza	B

Shops

Farmers' Market

At intersection of New England and New York avenues, Winter Park. Sat 7am–1pm. Shop for fresh fruit and veggies, as well as plants, flowers, and various baked goods at this weekly market, located in and around a former train station.

Fredlund Wildlife Gallery

528 S Park Ave, Winter Park Ⓣ407/622-0102, Ⓦwww.fredlundwildlife.com. Closed Mon. Featuring a huge collection of paintings, prints, and sculptures of every animal imaginable, plus a few paintings of Florida landscapes. None of the works come cheap, and the best of them go for thousands of dollars.

Scott Laurent Galleries

348 N Park Ave, Winter Park Ⓣ407/629-0278. One of Park Avenue's most absorbing galleries, full of miscellaneous *objets d'art*, including some wonderfully colorful glasswork and an array of old- and new-style lamps.

Shou'Ture

339 S Park Ave, Winter Park Ⓣ407/647-9372, Ⓦwww.shouture.com. The designer shoes here are definitely on the pricey side, but the blow is softened somewhat by free pedicures with purchases and a Champagne Happy Hour (Mon–Fri 5–6pm).

Timothy's Gallery

236 N Park Ave, Winter Park Ⓣ407/629-0707, Ⓦwww.timothysgallery.com. Timothy's features the work of diverse American artists, from elegantly designed jewelry, silk jackets, and scarves, to rather bizarre sculptures in ceramics and metal.

The Wine Room

270 S Park Ave, Winter Park Ⓣ407/696-9463, Ⓦwww.thewineroomonline.com. An oenophile's paradise, with over one thousand wines for sale and more than 150 to taste. Prices are reasonable and there are some rare bottles to choose from.

▼ SHOU'TURE

▲ THE WINE ROOM

Restaurants and cafés

Authentic Cuban Café

133 E Morse Blvd, Winter Park ☎ 407/626-2822. This small and cheap Cuban café with sandwiches (around $5), *frijoles*, and strong coffee is a good place for a quick bite in an informal atmosphere that's quite rare in Winter Park.

The Briarpatch

252 N Park Ave, Winter Park ☎ 407/628-8651. Although it mainly serves rather ordinary and overpriced sandwiches (around $10), this Park Avenue eatery is reputed for its huge – and again, expensive – slices of multi-flavored cakes. The tables outside are great for people watching.

Chez Vincent

533 W New England Ave, Winter Park ☎ 407/599-2929, ⓦ www.chezvincent.com. This intimate French restaurant takes local ingredients such as grouper and snapper and gives them a delicious French twist, as in the grouper Provençale or the snapper with capers, shallots, and white wine. Most main courses cost $20–30.

Hot Olives

463 W New England Ave, Winter Park ☎ 407/629-1030, ⓦ www.hotolivesrestaurant.com. Closed Sun. The only olives on the menu are the "spicy fried" ones that come as a starter. Otherwise, the dishes here are simple with a gourmet touch, such as the halibut with tapenade and artichoke cream sauce, and for the most part cost $20–30. The shaded outside terrace is the best place to eat, since the indoor dining room can get a bit hectic.

Power House

109–111 E Lyman Ave, Winter Park ☎ 407/645-3616. The place for an uncomplicated Middle Eastern–style sandwich, a tasty soup, or a vitamin-packed fruit juice, all at economical prices ($5–7 for most sandwiches).

Bars

The Wine Room

270 S Park Ave, Winter Park ☎ 407/696-9463, ⓦ www.thewineroomonline.com. Relax in a leather armchair and look important as you degust a few wines from one of Central Florida's most extensive selections. Cheeses, patés, and cold meats are also available, which makes this a good place for a pre-dinner apéritif.

South of Orlando

The area south of Orlando, stretching fifteen miles or so south and east from Walt Disney World, appears at first glance to offer the same rows of strip malls, chain restaurants, and fly-by-night tourist attractions. Indeed, the urban scenery in and around the main town in these parts, Kissimmee, is even uglier than usual, especially along US-192. Fortunately, the rural and attractive landscape south of the highway features several attractions – usually based in some way on animals and providing an opportunity to get out into the countryside. The anomaly here is Celebration, a squeaky-clean town that's the "living" extension of the Disney theme parks just to the north. With this exception, however, the rest of the area is marked by a rustic atmosphere as genuine as it is unexpected, a welcome contrast to the more hectic pace of Orlando.

Gatorland

1401 S Orange Blossom Trail, Orlando ☎407/855-5496 or 1-800/393-5297, Ⓦwww.gatorland.com. Daily 9am–5pm. $22.95, children 3–12 $14.95. Opened in 1949 when tourists began visiting the state in significant numbers, Gatorland showcases the region's most famous animal: the alligator. The park's residents also include crocodiles (whose noses are more pointed than alligators'), llamas, snakes, and flamingos. For most of the day the gators and crocs lie motionless, refusing to budge even for the cold hotdogs thrown at them by visitors, but for the twice-daily Gator Jumparoo Show they use their powerful tail muscles to leap from the water to snap up whole chickens held out on sticks. In the Gator Wrestlin' Show smaller alligators prove to be no match for a portly park employee who sits on top of them and uses the animal's mouth to perform a few dicey stunts; while the Up-Close Encounters Show involves sharing assorted creepy-crawlies with the most terrified looking members of the audience. The entire park, including all of the shows, can easily be seen in half a day.

▼ CELEBRATION

Celebration

Ⓦwww.celebrationfl.com. Created by Disney, this town, nestled between Kissimmee and

▲ CLASSIC-CAR CRUISE AT OLD TOWN

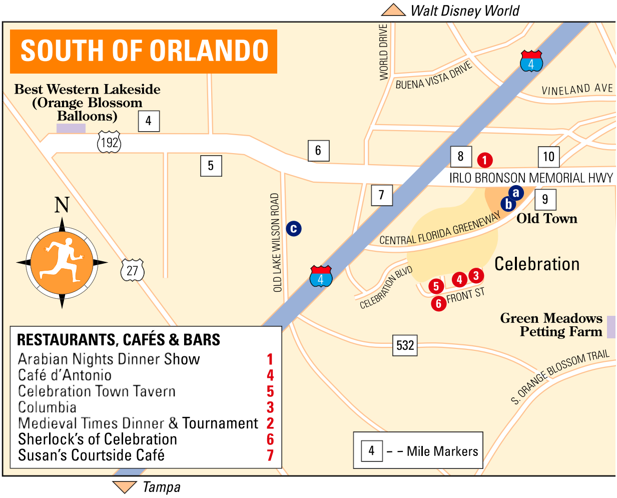
the theme parks, opened in 1996. The design attempts to capture the American ideal of community: old-fashioned exteriors, homes close to the road so neighbors are more likely to interact, and a congenial downtown area beside a tranquil lake. Famous architects were brought in to design some of downtown's buildings – check out Cesar Pelli's 1950s-style cinema – and the first 350 home sites sold out before a single model was even complete. Enthusiasts applaud Celebration's friendly small-town feeling, where town events are well attended and children can walk carefree to school, all without being a gated community. Detractors use words such as "contrived" and "sterile" to describe the atmosphere. Like or loathe the concept, Celebration is an undeniably pleasant place to spend a few hours. There are several good restaurants and walking around the virtually traffic-free streets is as relaxed as it gets in and around Orlando. The lake can be enjoyed to its fullest from the quiet terrace at the charming *Celebration Hotel* (see p.172).

Old Town

5770 W Irlo Bronson Memorial Hwy, Mile Marker #9, Kissimmee ☎ 407/396-4888 or 1-800/843-4202, Ⓦ www.old-town.com. Shops daily 10am–11pm, rides daily noon–11pm. Free entry, buy individual tickets for each ride or an all-day pass for $15 (two-ticket rides only) or $25 (all rides). This throwback to a traditional fairground comes complete with a Ferris wheel, go-kart track, bumper cars, merry-go-round, spinning teacups, and a rickety-looking rollercoaster – all charmingly quaint when compared with the high-tech

US-192

Also known as **Irlo Bronson Memorial Highway**, this unappealing road is the main east–west corridor south of Orlando, running past a good many of the sights mentioned in this chapter. It uses a system of **Mile Markers**. These numbered boards, roughly one mile apart along either side of the road serve as reference points: Old Town, for example, is at Mile Marker #9 and the turn-off for World Drive (for Walt Disney World) is at Mile Marker #7.


SOUTH OF ORLANDO
Walt Disney World
Tampa
Best Western Lakeside (Orange Blossom Balloons)
WORLD DRIVE
BUENA VISTA DRIVE
VINELAND AVE
IRLO BRONSON MEMORIAL HWY
OLD LAKE WILSON ROAD
CENTRAL FLORIDA GREENEWAY
CELEBRATION BLVD
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Old Town
Celebration
Green Meadows Petting Farm
S. ORANGE BLOSSOM TRAIL
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RESTAURANTS, CAFÉS & BARS
Arabian Nights Dinner Show 1
Café d'Antonio 4
Celebration Town Tavern 5
Columbia 3
Medieval Times Dinner & Tournament 2
Sherlock's of Celebration 6
Susan's Courtside Café 7
4 – – Mile Markers

attractions elsewhere in Orlando. There's also over 75 shops to browse, from the interestingly quirky to downright tacky (see "Shops," p.153). The best time to visit Old Town is on Saturday night all year round, when, at 8.30pm, the hundreds of classic cars that started arriving on Friday are paraded up and down the streets in what is the largest weekly classic-car cruise in the US (a smaller cruise takes place on Fri at 9pm).

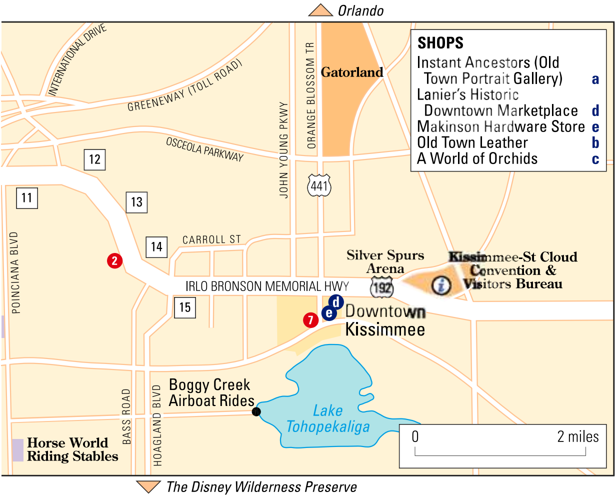
Downtown Kissimmee and Lake Tohopekaliga

Once the hub of Florida's important cattle industry, downtown Kissimmee, a mundane network of streets just south of US-192 where it intersects with Orange Blossom Trail, retains to this day its cowboy feel. Its most compelling feature is three-mile-long Lakeshore Boulevard, which offers a good look at pretty **Lake Tohopekaliga**, headwaters to the Everglades and home to many of Florida's native birds. Getting out onto the lake is best done by taking an airboat ride (see box, below).

The only other thing worth seeing here stands on the

Boggy Creek Airboat Rides

Although lasting just thirty rather noisy minutes, an **airboat ride on Lake Tohopekaliga** (☎407/344-9550, Ⓦwww.bcairboats.com. Daily 9am–5pm $21.95, children 3–12 $15.95) is the ideal way to glimpse some of the wildlife present in these parts. The boats skid across the water at speeds of up to 45mph, hardly approaching the animals by stealth. Nevertheless, you stand a good chance of spotting an alligator or two snoozing among the reeds and, high up in the cypress trees on the riverbanks, bald eagles. To get to the departure point for rides, go south from the intersection of Poinciana Boulevard and US-192 (Mile Marker #11) for about eighteen miles until you reach Southport Park. One-hour night tours (when alligators are at their most active) are also offered (March–Oct only; $34.95, children 3–12 $29.95; minimum of six people).


Orlando
SHOPS
Instant Ancestors (Old Town Portrait Gallery) a
Lanier's Historic Downtown Marketplace d
Makinson Hardware Store e
Old Town Leather b
A World of Orchids c
INTERNATIONAL DRIVE
GREENEWAY (TOLL ROAD)
OSCEOLA PARKWAY
JOHN YOUNG PKWY
ORANGE BLOSSOM TR
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Silver Spurs Arena
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Downtown Kissimmee
BASS ROAD
HOAGLAND BLVD
Boggy Creek Airboat Rides
Lake Tohopekaliga
Horse World Riding Stables
0
2 miles
The Disney Wilderness Preserve

corner of Monument Avenue and Johnston Street. The eccentric Monument of States, erected in 1943 to honor the former president of the local All-States Tourist Club, is a forty-foot obelisk comprising garishly painted concrete blocks adorned with pieces of stone and fossil representing all of the American states and twenty foreign countries.

Reptile World Serpentarium

5705 E Irlo Bronson Memorial Hwy, St Cloud ☎ 407/892-6905. Oct–Aug Tues–Sun 9am–5.30pm. $5.75, children 6–17 $4.75, children 3–5 $3.75. George VanHorn has been handling snakes for years, and the stub at the end of one of his fingers is testament to the occupational hazards of extracting snake venom for sale to anti-venom research laboratories. The fascinating extraction process can be viewed twice daily at noon and 3pm, featuring George, his wife, and several moody vipers, rattlesnakes, and cobras. The show takes place behind a glass screen, but you can still see clearly as the poison drips into vials, sometimes in veritable torrents. The remainder of the attraction consists of a caged collection of venomous and non-venomous snakes from around the world and can be perused quickly.

Green Meadows Petting Farm

1368 S Poinciana Blvd ☎ 407/846-0770, ⓦ www.greenmeadowsfarm.com. Daily 9.30am–5.30pm. $19 for adults and children. This petting zoo goes several steps further than the various opportunities Disney provides for children to

▲ GREEN MEADOWS PETTING FARM

▲ RURAL FARMLAND ALONG US-192

play with animals. For a start, the country setting is considerably more rural and peaceful than any theme park could hope to be. It's also much less crowded, allowing the kids as much time to bond with the animals as they desire. The price of admission includes a two-hour guided tour (last one at 4pm), taking in pigs, cows, chickens, turkeys, donkeys, and other farmyard animals, where the reasonably informative commentary takes a definite backseat to hands-on experience, from simple stroking and petting to the full-blown milking of a cow. Kids can also enjoy pony and tractor rides.

Horse World Riding Stables

3705 S Poinciana Blvd, Kissimmee ☎ 407/847-4343, Ⓦ www.horseworldstables.com. Daily 9am–5pm. $39–69. The horses may be only slightly more animated than an Audio-Animatronics figure, but riding them along the nature trails around these stables is a pleasant way to get away from the theme-park hustle and bustle. There are three different rides to choose from, lasting from 45 to 90 minutes. The Nature Trail Ride and the Intermediate Trail Ride are very tame and suitable for the whole family; the Advanced Trail Ride involves some cantering and is by reservation only.

The Disney Wilderness Preserve

2700 Scrub Jay Trail, Kissimmee ☎ 407/935-0002. Mon–Fri 9am–5pm. $3, children 6–17 $2. For Disney to continue developing its Central Florida land holdings, it was legally required to mitigate the impact that such development would have on the environment by creating a large, ecologically significant project nearby. This obligation was fulfilled in 1992 when Disney acquired 8500 acres of a former ranch twelve miles southwest of downtown Kissimmee and handed it over to The Nature Conservancy.

So, despite bearing the Disney name, this place has nothing to do with theme parks. On the contrary, it's a wonderfully peaceful place, where the only construction has been a three-mile walking trail with a couple of benches and tables for picnics. Wetlands are scattered throughout the preserve,

Orange Blossom Balloons

To appreciate what a rural landscape this really is, full of lakes, swamps, and forests, those rich enough can take a one-hour hot-air balloon ride over the Central Florida countryside (for reservations, call Ⓣ407/894-5040, Ⓦwww.orangeblossomballoons.com. $175, children under 10 free with a paying adult).

The exact flight path is dependent on the winds (the actual launch site is also determined by wind direction), but every effort is made to fly as close as possible to Disney. Upon landing you drink a Champagne toast, then head back for a buffet breakfast. Rendezvous daily 5.30am – 6.30am at *Best Western Lakeside*, 7769 W Irlo Bronson Memorial Hwy.

homes to diverse populations of wading birds, including endangered Florida sandhill cranes and woodstorks.

Shops

Instant Ancestors (Old Town Portrait Gallery)

5770 W Irlo Bronson Memorial Hwy, Old Town Ⓣ407/870-0817, Ⓦwww.oldtownportraitgallery.com. Have your face inserted into realistic old-fashioned portraits of cowboys, saloon girls, Victorian families, Civil War generals, and the like.

Lanier's Historic Downtown Marketplace

108 Broadway Ave, downtown Kissimmee Ⓣ407/933-5679, Ⓦwww.laniersantiques.com. Closed Sun. Space in this large, chaotically organized antique store is rented out to different vendors, which ensures an eclectic selection, including some colorful cow figurines.

Makinson Hardware Store

308 Broadway Ave, downtown Kissimmee Ⓣ407/847-2100. Closed Sun. Opened in 1884, Florida's oldest operating hardware store has long since been surpassed by the big chains – but does do a fine line in plastic models of horses and cattle.

Old Town Leather

5770 W Irlo Bronson Memorial Hwy, Old Town Ⓣ407/396-1356, Ⓦwww.oldtownleather.com. The place for all things leather: biker jackets, wallets, cowboy hats, and belts, of which there's a particularly large selection.

A World of Orchids

2501 Old Lake Wilson Rd, Kissimmee Ⓣ407/369-1887, Ⓦwww.aworldoforchids.com. Closed Sun. Stroll around this vast conservatory crammed with thousands of rare and beautiful orchids from all over the world as you would a botanical gardens (there's no charge just for looking). All of the plants are for sale, along with other garden accessories.

▼ MAKINSON HARDWARE STORE

MAKINSON
HARDWARE

Restaurants and cafés

Arabian Nights Dinner Show

6225 W Irlo Bronson Hwy, Kissimmee ⓣ407/239-9223 or 1-800/553-6116, ⓦwww.arabian-nights.com. $47, children 3–11 $29; discounts if you book online. Eat quite good steak, chicken, or pasta dinners while taking in a show made memorable not by the ham acting and flimsy storyline, but by the seventy-strong cast of strikingly beautiful horses, including the Black Stallion, a gift of Walter Farley, creator of the eponymous fictional horse.

Café d'Antonio

691 Front St, Celebration ⓣ407/566-2233, ⓦwww.antoniosonline.com. The good Italian food here includes plenty of meat dishes (mainly beef and veal for $20–35, plus some chicken offerings for around $15), along with some tempting pasta creations ($10–18). The atmosphere, however, is a bit on the stuffy side.

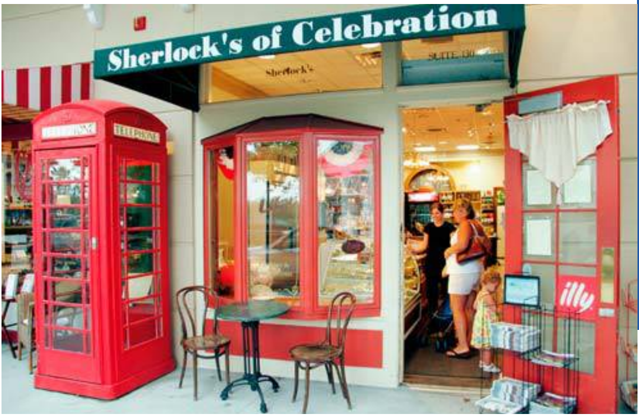
Celebration Town Tavern

721 Front St, Celebration ⓣ407/566-2526, ⓦwww.thecelebrationtowntavern.com. The Bostonian owners have made New England seafood – clams, scrod, Maine lobster, and the like – the house specialty here (mostly costing $16–23). However, the barbecue baby back ribs ($21) are possibly the best thing on the menu. From 10pm to 2am you can order light meals at the bar – convenient given the relatively early closing hours of Celebration's other restaurants.

Columbia

649 Front St, Celebration ⓣ407/566-1505, ⓦwww.columbiarestaurant.com. The elegant dining room looks like something straight out of a luxurious Iberian villa and the Spanish food, notably the paella and red snapper Alicante, is of an appropriately high standard. Main courses are $16 and up and there's live Spanish folk music on Fri evenings.

▲ COLUMBIA RESTAURANT



▲ SHERLOCK'S OF CELEBRATION

Medieval Times Dinner & Tournament

4510 W Irlo Bronson Hwy, Kissimmee Ⓣ407/396-1518 or 1-888/935-6878, Ⓦwww.medievaltimes.com. $54.95, children under 12 $34.95; discounts if you book online. Knights joust on Andalusian stallions and display fine stage fighting skills as wenches serve a simple but hearty feast of roast chicken and spare ribs inside a replica eleventh-century castle.

Sherlock's of Celebration

715 Bloom St, Celebration Ⓣ407/566-1866, Ⓦwww.sherlocksgroup.com. An English-style teahouse with a very wide selection of teas, chais, and tisanes; drink one with a delicious slice of cake costing around $5.

Susan's Courtside Café

18 S Orlando Ave, downtown Kissimmee Ⓣ407/518-1150. Closed Sat & Sun. One of a handful of eateries catering to the office workers in downtown Kissimmee, this one has good sandwiches and home-made pizza for around $7 and up.

Bars

Celebration Town Tavern

721 Front St, Celebration Ⓣ407/566-2526. Open until 2am, long after the rest of Celebration has closed down for the night, the bar area of this restaurant is a great place to strike up conversations with tourists and locals alike.

▼ CELEBRATION TOWN TAVERN

Celebration Town Tavern
Family, Food & Friends

Day-trips

While there are certainly more than enough things to do in Orlando and its parks to fill a one- and even a two-week stay, other points of interest – and the beach – are never too far away. This chapter suggests a handful of possible day-trips, none more than a two-hour drive from the city. Besides some well-known and well-trod tourist destinations such as Tampa's Busch Gardens and the Kennedy Space Center on the east coast, there are a few quirky, offbeat places that reveal sides of Central Florida not immediately apparent to the casual visitor.

Busch Gardens

3000 E Busch Blvd, Tampa. Two miles east of I-275 or two miles west of I-75, exit 51 coming from the north or exit 265 coming from the south. A theme park on the scale of those at Disney, Universal, and SeaWorld, Tampa's Busch Gardens is the most obvious day-trip from Orlando, largely because park entrance is included in the Orlando FlexTicket (see p.181). That said, the park will certainly appeal to animal lovers and contains some superb thrill rides that compare very favorably with those on offer in Orlando.

Busch Gardens, which opened in 1959 as a brewery (Anheuser-Busch is the park's owner), was developed into a park six years later, taking Africa as its theme.

For park hours and prices, see "Theme park practicalities" in Essentials.

The park is divided into several areas, the biggest single section being the eighty-acre **Serengeti Plain**. It's roamed by giraffes, buffaloes, zebras, antelopes, black and white rhino, and elephants, and is the closest the place gets to showing anything genuinely African; look down on the beasts from the Skyride cable car or get a closer view from the pseudo-steam train that traverses the park (no extra charge for either mode of transport). The tropical **Myombe Reserve** is home to chimps and gorillas and with its waterfall and even

▼ BUSCH GARDENS

mist, it's also a good attempt to re-create an African feel and is worth a look. Although the other areas bear names such as Morocco, Egypt, Timbuktu, and Congo, their links with the continent are more tenuous. Rides rather than animals predominate here. There are two flume rides in Stanleyville and an even wetter raft ride in Congo, plus a small rollercoaster for children in Timbuktu. These all pale in comparison with the park's stellar collection of amazing thrill rides. The most recent addition is **Sheikra** in Stanleyville, with its terrifying 200-foot, 90-degree dive, which, along with Egypt's **Montu**, a very high, inverted coaster, is the park's most frightening ride: like some of Orlando's scariest rollercoasters, your feet are left dangling in midair on both rides. A notch lower in terms of fear factor – but still very good – are Congo's **Kumba**, full of high-speed plunges and loop-the-loops, and Morocco's **Gwazi**, a giant wooden coaster. After all this, retire to the Hospitality House and enjoy two free cups of various Anheuser-Busch beers.

The Villages

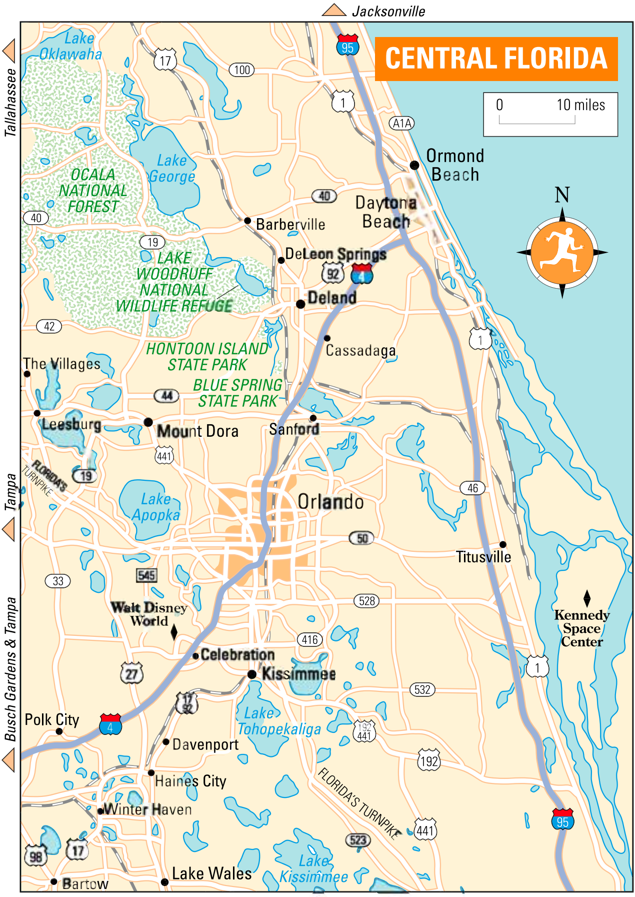
1100 Main St, The Villages ☎ 352/753-2270 or 1-800/245-1081, ⓦ www.thevillages.com. Central Florida is dotted with communities, occasionally described as "country clubs," where seniors can live out their remaining years in peace – and sometimes considerable luxury. One such community, The Villages, sprawling on either side of US-27 roughly halfway between the towns of Leesburg and Ocala, is among the fastest growing in the US; in these parts, The Villages is considered a town in its own right. Thanks to eight eighteen-hole golf courses (all open to the public) and a multitude of shops, restaurants, and services, including a fully equipped hospital, residents rarely have the need – or inclination – to venture beyond the gates. Should you wish to sample Floridian retirement living on its grandest scale, you can do so for surprisingly little: $75–175 per night (depending on the time of year) in a fully furnished, two-bedroom guest villa, which also includes some free rounds of golf, dinners at some of the restaurants, and other perks designed to get you hooked on the easy life.

Mount Dora

US-441 about 40 miles northwest from Orlando. A Victorian-era Florida village set on a pristine lake, Mount Dora is all picket fences, wrought-iron balconies, and fancy wood-trimmed buildings. The town is quaint to the point of being a little nauseating after a couple of hours (all you need to visit compact Mount Dora on foot), although strolling the peaceful streets is a pleasure since Mount Dora is one of the few pedestrian-friendly towns in Central Florida. Once you've worked up an appetite, drop in

▼ THE VILLAGES

LA REINA
SALES AND INFORMATION


CENTRAL FLORIDA
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Jacksonville
Tallahassee
Tampa
Busch Gardens & Tampa
Lake Oklawaha
OCALA NATIONAL FOREST
Lake George
LAKE WOODRUFF NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
HONTOON ISLAND STATE PARK
BLUE SPRING STATE PARK
Ormond Beach
Daytona Beach
Barberville
DeLeon Springs
Deland
Cassadaga
The Villages
Leesburg
Mount Dora
Sanford
FLORIDA'S TURNPIKE
Lake Apopka
Orlando
Titusville
Kennedy Space Center
Walt Disney World
Celebration
Kissimmee
Lake Tohopekaliga
Polk City
Davenport
Haines City
Winter Haven
Bartow
Lake Wales
Lake Kissimmee
FLORIDA'S TURNPIKE
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1

at one of the tea rooms that fit perfectly with Mount Dora's quaintness for tea and scones.

Cassadaga

Just east of I-4 (exit 114), fifteen miles north of Sanford and about 35 miles from Orlando. Deep in the forest, a village populated by spiritualists is just about as far from the classic Orlando vacation experience that you can get. Cassadaga has existed since 1875, when a young New Yorker bought 35 acres of land after being told during a séance that one day he would be instrumental in founding a spiritualist community.

There are several spiritual centers in the village offering services encompassing everything from psychic advice, palm and tarot readings, interpretations of astrological charts, communication with the spiritual world through a medium, and recollection of memories from past lives through hypnosis. Prices vary little from center to center: $60 for 30 minutes, $75 for

45 minutes, and $100 for an hour are the usual rates. The Cassadaga Spiritualist Camp in the Andrew Jackson Davis Building, on the corner of Route 4139 (Cassadaga Road) and Stevens Street (Ⓣ386/228-2880, Ⓦwww.cassadaga.org), takes a more all-embracing approach than the other centers, offering regular seminars and lectures covering topics ranging from UFO cover-ups to out-of-body traveling, along with weekly – presumably non-psychic – bingo evenings. The Universal Centre of Cassadaga, across the street at 460 Cassadaga Rd (Ⓣ386/228-3190 or 1-888/227-7232, Ⓦwww.universalcentre.net), will give readings over the telephone. Other than the spiritualist centers, there are no sights in Cassadaga. However, with its *Blair Witch Project*–style location and captivatingly surreal, slightly eerie atmosphere, the village is definitely worth a visit even if you're not interested in seeking out the services of a spiritualist.

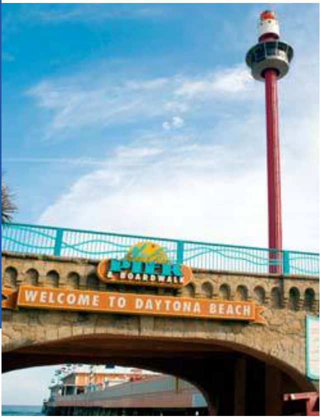
Blue Spring State Park

2100 W French Ave, Orange City
Ⓣ386/775-3663. Daily 8am–sunset.
Cars $5, pedestrians and cyclists $1.

The year-round 72°F (22°C) waters at Blue Spring State Park, thirty miles or so north of Orlando – take I-4 to exit 114 and then go south on US-17/92 for a couple of miles – attract manatees between mid-November and mid-March. Affectionately known as "sea cows," these best-loved of Florida's endangered animals swim here from the cooler waters of the St Johns River, and the colder it is there the more manatees you'll see here (early morning on a cold winter's day is the optimal time for sightings). Several observation platforms have been constructed for viewing purposes, and although swimming with the manatees is not permitted, you can swim, snorkel, and scuba dive in the springs when there are none present (March to mid-Nov). Canoes, kayaks, and inner tubes are available for rent. Blue Spring Park can get quite crowded, especially at weekends, so consider a trip across the St Johns River to the much quieter, uninhabited **Hontoon Island State Park** (Ⓣ386/736-5309), a verdant dollop of wooded land, offering plenty of shade for picniking, set within very flat and swampy terrain. Without a private boat, Hontoon Island is reachable only by the free ferry (daily 8am to an hour before sunset) from a landing stage off Route 44, six miles west of the town of Deland.

If you wish to stay the night in Blue Spring State Park, there's a $20-a-night campground and air-conditioned cabins for $85 that sleep up to four people. In Hontoon Island State Park, you can choose from basic camping sites for $12 a night or rustic cabins costing $25 for four people or $30 for six people.

▼ BLUE SPRING STATE PARK



▲ DAYTONA BEACH

Daytona Beach

Fifty miles northeast of Orlando along I-4. Though better known for its annual motorbike and NASCAR racing events (see p.181), Daytona Beach is the most feasible beach trip within spitting distance of Orlando. Once a renowned hot spot for college kids on Spring Break, the town has made a conscious effort in recent years to distance itself from such shenanigans. However, the bikers and racecar enthusiasts who have largely taken the place of the students have hardly made this place the epitome of refinement. The pervading atmosphere is one of a somewhat tacky seaside town, full of amusement arcades, T-shirt shops, and jet-ski rides.

The beach, however, is the main reason for a visit: a wide, twenty-mile stretch of light brown sand. Unusually for Florida, you're allowed to drive your car and park it on designated stretches of the beach ($5; Feb–Nov only). The busiest section of the beach is around the pier at the end of Main Street (no cars are allowed on the beach in the immediate vicinity of the pier); while three miles to the north along the seafront Atlantic Avenue, **Ormond Beach** (also no cars on the beach) is calmer and more upscale.

Kennedy Space Center

Fifty miles east of Orlando along routes 538 (Beeline Expressway) or 50 ☎407/449-4444, www.kennedyspacecenter.com. Occupying a flat, marshy island which doubles, paradoxically, as a wildlife refuge, the nucleus of the US space program is also a hugely (and justifiably) popular tourist attraction. The departure point of all visits is the **KSC Visitor Complex** (daily 9am–5.30pm), a museum dedicated to everything space-related. There are opportunities here to take part in a light-hearted interactive mission to Mars (one of the relatively few attractions that will

▼ KENNEDY SPACE CENTER

Kennedy Space Center practicalities

Coming from Orlando **on Route 528**, take Route 407 until it reaches Route 405, then follow the signs for the Kennedy Space Center. Coming from Orlando **on Route 50**, take the Route 405 exit (the first one after going under the I-95), then follow the signs. Mears Transportation (☎407/423-5566, Ⓦwww.mearstranportation.com) operates a shuttle from the main tourist areas in Orlando to the Kennedy Space Center on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays ($30 return).

Admission includes access to the KSC Visitor Complex, the IMAX movies, the Kennedy Space Center Bus Tour, and the Astronaut Hall of Fame just down the road in Titusville ($38, children 3–11 $28).

In addition to the standard Kennedy Space Center visit, the **NASA Up-close Tour** gives an even closer look at the launch pad and takes you to a facility that makes components for the International Space Station; and the **Cape Canaveral: Then & Now Tour** visits the now-retired launch sites of the Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo programs (both tours: $21, children 3–11 $15; reservations recommended).

appeal especially to children), inspect spacesuits and actual mission capsules, and meet and question a real-life astronaut in Astronaut Encounter. Meanwhile, the deceptively simple rockets standing outside the museum in the **Rocket Garden** are cleverly illuminated to show how they looked at blast off. The highlight, however, is the **IMAX theater**, where two films (that change sporadically) convey quite effectively many of the sensations of space travel on five-story screens using footage from actual missions and 3-D effects.

The second part of the visit consists of the **Kennedy Space Center Tour**. A bus (daily 10am–2.45pm; departures every 15min; tour lasts 2hr–2hr 30min) leaves from the KSC Visitor Complex for the Vehicle Assembly Building, a gargantuan structure inside which Space Shuttles are assembled and loaded with payloads (equipment carried by spacecraft) before being rolled along the huge tracks of the "crawlerway" towards the launch pad. Unfortunately, access to the VAB is prohibited, and the bus continues swiftly on to a vantage-point from which you can gaze at the **launch pad**, which, if a Space Shuttle is not already in place ready for take-off (chances are that it won't be), is no more interesting than any other large pile of scaffolding. The remainder of the tour includes an inspection of a Saturn V rocket, which took the first Apollo mission into space, and an impressive simulated Apollo countdown and take-off.

If you want to witness a **real-life launch**, call ☎321/449-4400 or visit the website for dates and times, as well as the various launch-viewing packages on offer (which sell out very quickly). There's a special restricted viewing area six miles away, although the magnitude of the blast is awesome enough from anywhere within a forty-mile radius. Nighttime launches are especially spectacular.

Shops

Cassadaga Spiritualist Camp Bookstore

112 Stevens St, Cassadaga ☎386/228-2880, Ⓦwww.cassadaga.org. Browse through the large

Welcome to the
Windsor Rose Tea Room
Gilbert

▲ THE WINDSOR ROSE TEA ROOM

selection of books about spiritualism and metaphysics, or pick up a soothing CD to help with your meditation.

Flea World

4311 Orlando Ave, Sanford ⓣ407/330-1792, ⓦwww.fleaworld.com. Fri–Sun 9am–6pm. This vast warehouse fifteen miles north of Orlando on US-17/92 accommodates over 1700 vendors selling everything from computer equipment to wine racks. There's a lot of junk, so you'll have to be patient to find that hidden treasure.

Renningers Antique Center

20651 US-441, just east of Mount Dora ⓣ352/383-8393 or 1-800/522-3555, ⓦwww.renningers.com. Sat & Sun 9am–5pm. A great one-stop-shop for antique hunters, this weekend market is attended by most of the area's antique stores. Various repair and restoration services are also offered. There's an extra big market with over a thousand additional dealers on the third weekend of January, February, and November.

Restaurants and cafés

Crown Colony Restaurant

Busch Gardens, Tampa. The park's best restaurant has large glass windows giving a nice view of the animals in the Serengeti Plain. The food is pretty standard: a roughly equal balance of seafood and meat dishes for $15–20, with a few fried items thrown in for the kids.

Daytona Diner

290 ½ N Beach St, Daytona Beach ⓣ386/258-8488. If you've ever wondered how bikers manage to get so big, you'll get an idea by coming to this Daytona Beach institution, where leather-clad patrons wolf down enormous fried breakfasts for around $5.

The Goblin Market

331b N Donnelly St, Mount Dora ⓣ352/735-0059, ⓦwww.goblinmarketrestaurant.com. Closed Mon. An intimate and romantic restaurant hidden down a quiet side-street, with a candlelit dining room, outside patio, and gourmet meals such as veal with gorgonzola cream sauce and hoisin pork loin with pineapple-citrus compote in the $15–20 price range.

The Windsor Rose Tea Room

144 W Fourth Ave, Mount Dora ⓣ352/735-2551. A decent spread of tea and scones will set you back around $20, while for the hungrier, hearty English delicacies such as Cornish pasties and Scotch eggs are also available.

Accommodation

Hotels, motels, B&Bs, and hostels

Orlando has thousands of rooms in a wide range of establishments. Luxury resorts are found at Walt Disney World and Universal Orlando while numerous chain hotels are on or near International Drive, dotted around Disney property in an area called Lake Buena Vista, and along US-192 to the south of Orlando. Add to this a few privately owned hotels and bed and breakfasts, situated mainly in downtown Orlando, and the choice is quite varied.

In a sprawling city like Orlando, your stay will be guided as much by location as by price. If you don't have your own transport, think about staying along International Drive or in downtown Orlando, both areas with good local bus connections. The resorts at Disney and Universal provide free transportation between the resorts and the parks, so you won't need a car if you're planning a Disney- or Universal-only vacation.

The prices at the Disney and Universal resorts are generally the highest you'll pay, with some of the fancier places demanding in excess of $300 per night. The hotels in Lake Buena Vista, International Drive, and downtown Orlando tend to be mid-range, usually not costing more than $150. You'll find the budget-priced motels lining US-192, where the cheapest rooms go for around $50 per night.

The Magic Kingdom

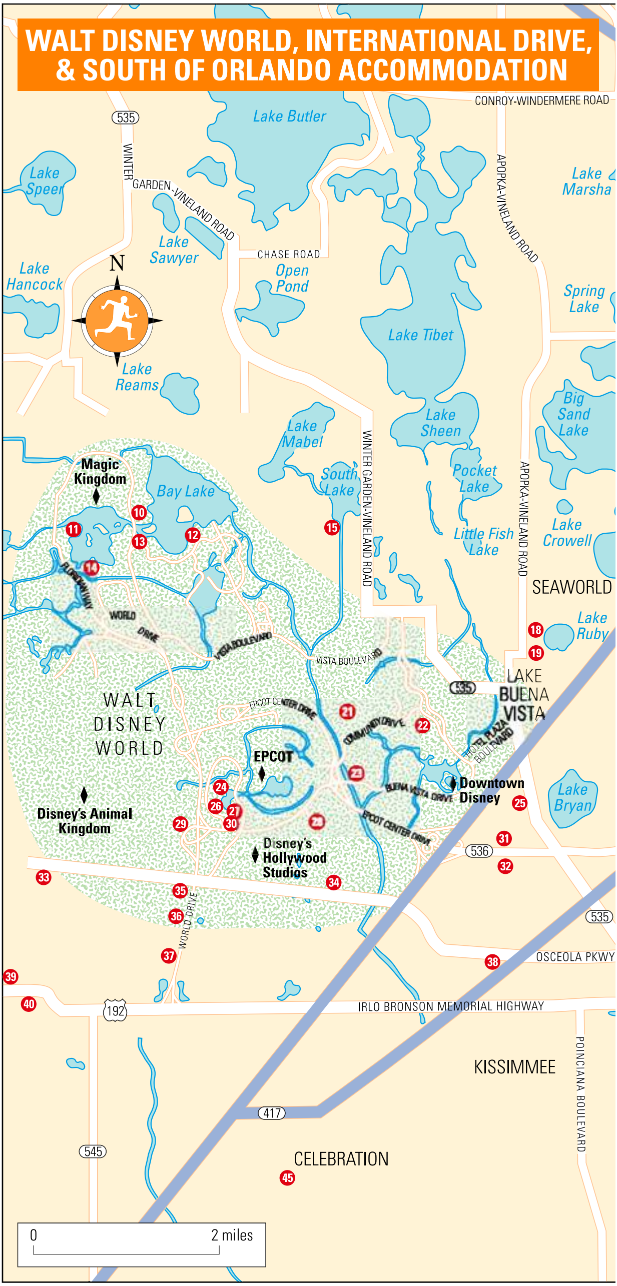
Contemporary Resort ☎ **407/824-1000.** The Disney monorail runs right through the center of this hotel, which takes its exterior design from the futuristic fantasies of the Magic Kingdom's Tomorrowland, but is disappointingly characterless inside. All the modern, minimalist rooms have balconies, some affording good views of the Magic Kingdom fireworks. From $259.

Fort Wilderness Resort & Campground ☎ **407/824-2900**. At this 700-acre site, you can pitch your tent, hook up your RV, or rent an air-conditioned six-berth cabin – a good deal for larger groups. Entertainment includes nightly, open-air screenings of classic Disney movies. Tents and RVs from $41, cabins from $249.

Grand Floridian Resort & Spa ☎ **407/824-3000**. Gabled roofs, verandas, and crystal chandeliers are among the frivolous variations on early Florida resort architecture at Disney's most upscale hotel. Although some of the rooms are on the

Booking a room

You can reserve a room at virtually all Orlando hotels on either the Internet or by telephone (many establishments have toll-free numbers for bookings made within the US & Canada); the central reservation lines for Disney and Universal resorts can be found in the boxes on p.168 & p.171. Book well in advance if you want to stay at a Disney or Universal resort during the busy summer months. The prices listed in this guide are typically based on a standard double in high season, though we also list prices for suites and other types of rooms when applicable. Note, however, that precise rates can vary widely throughout the year, particularly at the chain hotels, where they can change almost daily depending on demand.



WALT DISNEY WORLD, INTERNATIONAL DRIVE, & SOUTH OF ORLANDO ACCOMMODATION

CONROY-WINDERMERE ROAD
535
Lake Butler
WINTER GARDEN-VINELAND ROAD
Lake Speer
APOPKA-VINELAND ROAD
Lake Marsha
Lake Sawyer
CHASE ROAD
Open Pond
Lake Hancock
N
Spring Lake
Lake Tibet
Lake Reams
Lake Sheen
Big Sand Lake
Lake Mabel
WINTER GARDEN-VINELAND ROAD
Magic Kingdom
Bay Lake
South Lake
Pocket Lake
APOPKA-VINELAND ROAD
Lake Crowell
Little Fish Lake
10
11
13
12
15
14
FLORIDIAN WAY
WORLD DRIVE
SEAWORLD
Lake Ruby
18
19
VISTA BOULEVARD
VISTA BOULEVARD
535
LAKE BUENA VISTA
WALT DISNEY WORLD
EPCOT CENTER DRIVE
21
COMMUNITY DRIVE
22
HOTEL PLAZA BOULEVARD
EPCOT
23
Downtown Disney
BUENA VISTA DRIVE
Lake Bryan
24
25
26
27
Disney's Animal Kingdom
29
30
28
EPCOT CENTER DRIVE
31
536
Disney's Hollywood Studios
32
33
34
35
36
WORLD DRIVE
535
37
38
OSCEOLA PKWY
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192
IRLO BRONSON MEMORIAL HIGHWAY
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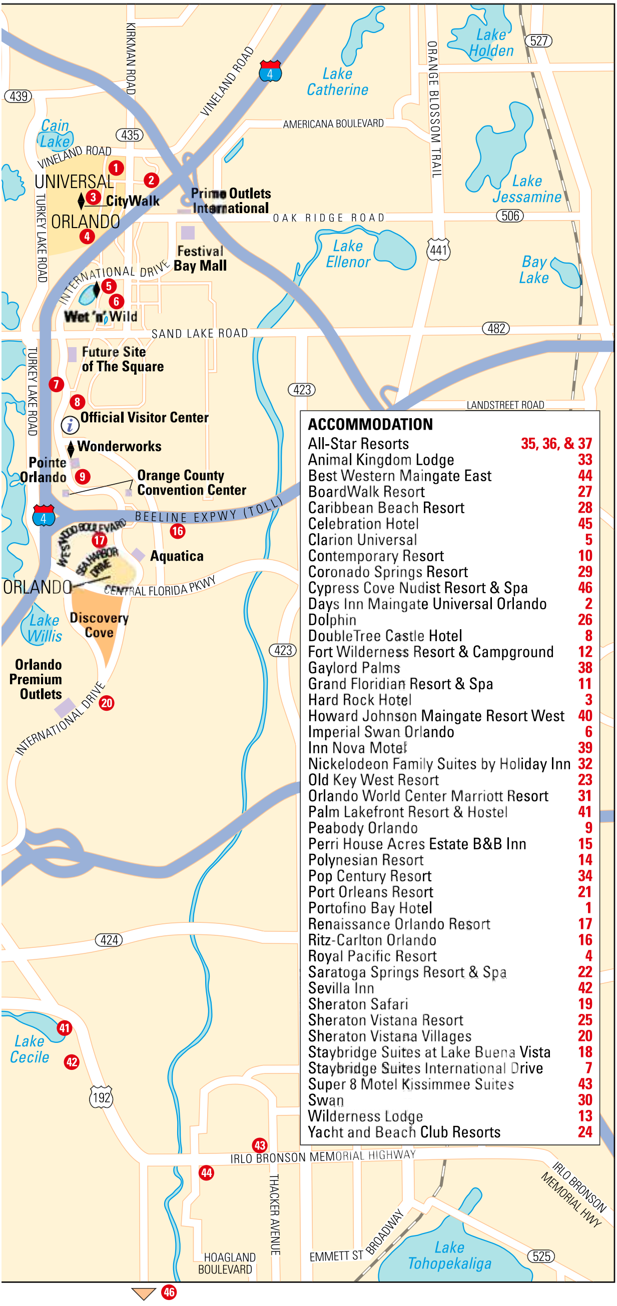
KIRKMAN ROAD
VINELAND ROAD
4
Lake Catherine
AMERICANA BOULEVARD
ORANGE BLOSSOM TRAIL
Lake Holden
527
439
Cain Lake
435
VINELAND ROAD
1
2
UNIVERSAL
3
CityWalk
ORLANDO
4
TURKEY LAKE ROAD
Prime Outlets International
OAK RIDGE ROAD
Lake Jessamine
506
Festival Bay Mall
Lake Ellenor
441
Bay Lake
INTERNATIONAL DRIVE
5
6
Wet 'n' Wild
SAND LAKE ROAD
482
Future Site of The Square
7
8
423
LANDSTREET ROAD
Official Visitor Center
Wonderworks
Pointe Orlando
9
Orange County Convention Center
4
BEELINE EXPWY (TOLL)
WESTWOOD BOULEVARD
17
16
SEA HARBOR DRIVE
Aquatica
ORLANDO
CENTRAL FLORIDA PKWY
Lake Willis
Discovery Cove
423
Orlando Premium Outlets
20
INTERNATIONAL DRIVE
424
41
Lake Cecile
42
192
43
IRLO BRONSON MEMORIAL HIGHWAY
44
THACKER AVENUE
HOAGLAND BOULEVARD
EMMETT ST
BROADWAY
Lake Tohopekaliga
IRLO BRONSON MEMORIAL HWY
525
46

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Royal Pacific Resort	4
Saratoga Springs Resort & Spa	22
Sevilla Inn	42
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Swan	30
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small side, the elegant surroundings and a sumptuous, full-service spa make this one of Disney's most relaxing bases; if you have money left over, you can rent a yacht to sail around the lake. From $375.

Polynesian Resort **ⓣ407/824-2000**. Accessible via the monorail, this effective, if somewhat tacky, imitation of a Polynesian beach hotel is most enjoyable if you spend your time on the lakeside beach under the shade of coconut palms. The tropical theme continues indoors with brightly colored rooms. From $329.

Wilderness Lodge **ⓣ407/824-3200**. This magnificent, oversized replica of a frontier log cabin is furnished with massive totem poles, a wood-burning fireplace in the lobby, and Southern-style wooden rocking chairs. The rooms are decorated in warm colors and follow a close-to-nature theme. From $215.

EPCOT/Disney's Hollywood Studios

BoardWalk Resort **ⓣ407/939-5100**. Styled after a 1930s mid-Atlantic seaside resort, complete with a waterfront promenade full of shops and restaurants, this resort goes to show that no theme is too humble for the Disney treatment. The rooms have a spacious, if not overly warm, feel, and all come with balconies. From $315.

Caribbean Beach Resort **ⓣ407/934-3400**. Disney's first attempt at a budget-priced hotel still offers reasonable value, with the comfortable but unremarkable rooms located in one of six "island villages," each with its own pool and beach surrounded by nicely landscaped grounds. From $145.

Dolphin **ⓣ407/934-4000**. Topped by the giant sculpture of a dolphin and decorated in dizzying pastel shades and reproduction artwork from the likes of Matisse and Warhol, this hotel has rooms with a fresh, contemporary design and some of the most comfortable beds in Disney. From $259.

Pop Century Resort **ⓣ407/938-4000**. With nearly 3000 rooms, this hotel devoted to mammoth pop icons from each decade of the second half of the twentieth century is Disney's largest. Like the *All-Star Resorts* (see below), the rooms are more basic than elsewhere in Disney – roughly equivalent to those at a mid-priced chain hotel. From $82.

Swan **ⓣ407/934-3000**. Separated by an artificial lake and beach from its sister hotel the *Dolphin*, the *Swan* is likewise whimsically decorated, though with sharper, more vibrant colors, and the rooms are equipped with every conceivable luxury. Although both on Disney property, these hotels aren't owned by Disney; reservations, however, can still be made through the Disney phone number or website. From $369.

Yacht and Beach Club Resorts **ⓣ407/934-7000 (Yacht Club), ⓣ407/934-8000 (Beach Club).** Late-nineteenth-century New England is the cue for these twin hotels, complete with clapboard facades, a miniature lighthouse, and bright, airy rooms inspired by nautical themes. Amusements include a small water park reminiscent of a Nantucket beach. From $315.

Disney's Animal Kingdom

All-Star Resorts **ⓣ407/939-6000 (Music), ⓣ407/939-5000 (Sports), ⓣ407/939-7000 (Movies).** The three themed resorts here are, along with the *Pop Century Resort* (see above), the most affordable of Disney's hotels. The *All-Star Music Resort* is decorated with giant, brightly colored cowboy boots, guitar-shaped swimming pools, and the like; the *All-Star Sports Resort* comes complete with huge Coca-Cola cups, American football helmets, and so on; and the *All-Star Movies Resort* has humongous reminders of Disney movies dotted about the place. Each complex has its own pools and nearly 2000 rooms, which are on the simple side and as garishly decorated as

The Disney resorts

Reservations at all of the **Walt Disney World resorts** can be made by phone or on the Internet (ⓣ407/939-6244, ⓦwww.disneyworld.com).

the hotel exteriors; the All-Star Music Resort also has 215 family suites (sleeping six) with kitchenettes. Rooms from $82, family suites from $179.

Animal Kingdom Lodge Ⓣ407/938-3000. Spectacular luxury accommodations where you can literally wake up to see African wildlife grazing outside your window. The rooms are among the most attractive in Disney, done in warm colors and decorated with African handicrafts. From $215, or $285 for a room with a view of the animal-filled savannah.

Coronado Springs Resort Ⓣ407/939-1000. Named after explorer Don Francisco de Coronado, this moderately priced resort pays homage to the cultures of Mexico and the American Southwest. The nearly 2000 rooms are built around a faux-Maya pyramid and have a vaguely Latino style masked by a healthy splash of the loud colors that Disney is so fond of. From $145.

Downtown Disney

Old Key West Resort Ⓣ407/827-7700. Caribbean-style wooden villas and shaded verandas contribute to a tropical ambience based on a late-nineteenth-century Key West resort. Accommodation is in studios (sleeping four) or one-, two-, and three-bedroom villas equipped with kitchens and washer dryers. Studios from $279, villas $370—1135.

Port Orleans Resort Ⓣ407/934-5000 (French Quarter), Ⓣ407/934-6000 (Riverside). This resort combines two Southern themes: the row houses and cobbled streets of New Orleans at the *French Quarter*, and the grandiose manors overlooking the Mississippi River at the *Riverside*. Rooms at both have a somewhat spartan feel, especially at the *Riverside*. From $145.

Saratoga Springs Resort & Spa Ⓣ407/827-1100. Modeled on America's first vacation resort that began in New York in the late 1800s, this faux Victorian complex has spacious studios that sleep up to four and well-equipped villas sleeping from four to twelve that include a whirlpool tub and washer dryer. Studios from $279, villas $370–1135.

Lake Buena Vista

Nickelodeon Family Suites by Holiday Inn 14500 Continental Gateway Ⓣ407/387-5437 or 1-866/462-6425, Ⓦwww.nickhotel.com. A true paradise for kids, with elaborate water slides at the two giant swimming pools, free food for under-5s if one accompanying adult pays for a meal, and even a spa for the little ones, plus a free shuttle to Disney and Universal. The spacious two-bedroom suites sleep up to six. From $259.

Orlando World Center Marriott Resort 8701 World Center Drive Ⓣ407/239-4200 or 1-800/380-7931, Ⓦwww.marriottworldcenter.com. Looking like a small city, this 2000-room hotel is the largest *Marriott* in the world. A giant lagoon-shaped swimming pool with water slide, four tennis courts, and a well-manicured golf course that snakes around the resort make it an excellent place for recreation. Guest rooms are comfortable without being overly luxurious. From $369.

Perri House Acres Estate B&B Inn 10417 Vista Oaks Court Ⓣ407/876-4830 or 1-800/780-4830, Ⓦwww.perrihouse.com. This friendly eight-room bed and breakfast hidden on four wooded acres – which is also a bird sanctuary – lies just a stone's throw from South Lake. Within five miles of the Magic Kingdom, it's the perfect antidote to all the theme-park frenzy. The clean and bright rooms have their own private outside entrances, and there's also a swimming pool and hot-tub. From $99.

Sheraton Safari 12205 S Apopka-Vineland Rd Ⓣ407/239-0444 or 1-888/354-1356, Ⓦwww.sheratonsafari.com. Based on an African-safari theme (including a water slide in the form of a giant python), this is one of a cluster of hotels less than half a mile from the entrance to Downtown Disney. The rooms are tastefully decorated with discreet African touches – think zebra-patterned bedspreads rather than leopard-skin rugs. From $129.

Sheraton Vistana Resort 8800 Vistana Center Drive Ⓣ407/239-3100, Ⓦwww.starwoodhotels.com. A sprawling, attractively laid out complex that feels like a village, dotted with comfortable one- and two-bedroom villas featuring large kitchens and washer dryers. You're never far from one of the several pools or on-site eateries, and plenty of activities are organized for the kids. From $150.

Staybridge Suites at Lake Buena Vista **8751 Suiteside Drive ☎407/238-0777, Ⓦwww.sborlando.com.** Next to the *Sheraton Safari*, but slightly removed from the other hotels in the vicinity, this place has a more relaxing atmosphere as a result. The spacious one- and two-bedroom suites have particularly well-equipped kitchens, free Internet access, DVD players, and sometimes even two bathrooms. A buffet breakfast and a thrice-weekly evening reception with free food and drink are included, as is a free shuttle to Disney. Recommended. From $139.

Universal Orlando

Hard Rock Hotel. Stuffed with rock 'n' roll memorabilia and resonating with familiar tunes blaring out at poolside, this is the least tranquil of the park's resorts – and the most popular with the younger generation. The simple yet stylish rooms are equipped with high-quality CD players, flat-screen TVs, and in the more expensive ones, MP3 docking stations. From $299.

Portofino Bay Hotel. This lavish re-creation of the Italian seaside village of Portofino has vintage Alfa Romeos and Fiats parked in the piazza. The luxurious rooms are decorated with marble and stylish Italian furniture, and more indulgence is on offer at the on-site spa. From $299.

Royal Pacific Resort. While there's nothing that original about the South Pacific island theme, the kids will enjoy the lagoon-style pool, and the rooms, decked in plenty of bamboo to enhance the "tropical" feel, are very comfortable. From $244.

International Drive and around

Clarion Universal **7299 Universal Blvd ☎407/351-5009 or 1-800/445-7299, Ⓦwww.clarionuniversal.com.** This mid-sized, easygoing hotel has cheerful rooms that sleep up to four, which makes it good value for families who want to be close to International Drive. From $80.

Days Inn Maingate Universal Orlando **5827 Caravan Court ☎407/351-3800 or 1-800/327-2111, Ⓦwww.orlandoflus.com.** Within walking distance of Universal Orlando, the rooms at this branch of the nationwide chain are nothing fancy, but do sleep up to four and are the best budget option close to Universal. From $70.

DoubleTree Castle Hotel **8629 International Drive ☎407/345-1511 or 1-800/952-2785, Ⓦwww.doubletreecastle.com.** This elaborate theme hotel, complete with Renaissance music, suits of armor, and medieval decor offers surprisingly understated and refined rooms, plus free transportation to the Disney parks – and complimentary chocolate-chip cookies on check-in.

Imperial Swan Orlando **7050 S Kirkman Rd ☎407/363-1835 or 1-800/327-3808, Ⓦwww.imperialswanorlando.com.** Cheap, decently sized rooms, two pools, free shuttle buses to the major theme parks, and a convenient location on the I-Ride Trolley route (see p.177) make this a good base for nondrivers on a tight budget. From $55.

Peabody Orlando **9801 International Drive ☎407/352-4000 or 1-800/732-2639, Ⓦwww.peabodyorlando.com.** The twenty-seven stories of opulent rooms are primarily aimed at delegates using the massive Orange County Convention Center across the street. If money is no object and you like lots of in-room luxuries, access to a fitness center, and floodlit tennis courts, this one's for you. In accordance with hotel tradition, real ducks parade through the lobby twice a day. From $300.

Renaissance Orlando Resort **6677 Sea Harbor Drive ☎407/351-5555 or 1-800/327-6677.** Directly opposite SeaWorld Orlando and close to International Drive, this upscale hotel enjoys an excellent location and has very spacious and comfortable rooms built around a bright and airy atrium. An on-site spa has also recently opened. From $289.

Ritz-Carlton Orlando **4040 Central Florida Parkway ☎407/206-2400 or 1-800/682-3665, Ⓦwww.grandelakes.com.** Definitely one of Orlando's most luxurious hotels, this elegant building with an intimate feel and superb rooms shares the 500-acre Grande Lakes Orlando – the hotel's landscaped grounds – with another excellent hotel, the *JW Marriott,* and a spacious golf course. The spa uses lots of citrus

The Universal resorts

Reservations at all of the **Universal Orlando resorts** can be made by phone or on the Internet (ⓣ1-888/273-1311, ⓦwww.uescape.com).

in its treatments, while the fitness center (free for guests) offers a tremendous range of state-of-the-art equipment. From $399.

Sheraton Vistana Villages 12401 International Drive ⓣ407/238-5000, ⓦwww.starwoodhotels.com. The sister property of the *Sheraton Vistana Resort* (see p.169) offers a similar style of accommodation in spacious, very modern, and well-equipped one- and two-bedroom villas. From $180.

Staybridge Suites International Drive 8480 International Drive ⓣ407/352-2400 or 1-800/866-4549, ⓦwww.sborlando.com. Offering the same accommodations and amenities as its sister hotel, *Staybridge Suites at Lake Buena Vista* (see opposite), this friendly and popular place is smack in the middle of I-Drive, so you can access numerous restaurants and attractions by foot. From $139.

Downtown Orlando

See map on p.134.

The Courtyard at Lake Lucerne 211 N Lucerne Circle E ⓣ407/648-5188, ⓦwww.orlandohistoricinn.com. A lush flower garden and four separate antique inns, one of which is the oldest house in Orlando, comprise this peaceful oasis of grace and hospitality nestled right in the busy downtown area. The very eclectic choice of accommodations range from elegantly furnished Victorian- and Edwardian-era rooms to airy Art Deco suites. From $120.

Embassy Suites 191 E Pine St ⓣ407/841-1000, ⓦwww.embassysuites.com. All 167 suites of this stylish high-rise open onto a busy atrium, although noise is not a problem. Each suite has two rooms, a microwave, and a fridge. A cooked-to-order breakfast and evening cocktail reception are included in the price. From $205.

Eõ Inn 227 N Eola Drive ⓣ407/481-8485 or 1-888/481-8488, ⓦwww.eoinn.com. Right on Lake Eola, this chic boutique hotel has trendy rooms with modern furnishings and sometimes lake views. The spa offers a full range of massages, facials, and other such treatments, and there's an inviting hot-tub on the rooftop terrace. From $119, lake views from $199.

Parliament House Resort 410 N Orange Blossom Trail, just east of downtown ⓣ407/425-7571, ⓦwww.parliamenthouse.com. This well known gay resort is notable for its party atmosphere, created by several bars, a disco, a pool, a lakeside beach, drag shows, and plenty of activities, rather than its 130 simple, yet functional, renovated rooms. From $64.

Travelodge 409 N Magnolia Ave ⓣ407/423-1671, ⓦwww.travelodge.com. This cheap, motel-style accommodation is within walking distance of the Orange Avenue bars and clubs, which means that it fills up very quickly on the weekends, so reserve in advance for Fri and Sat nights. There's also a small pool and free local calls. From $59.

Veranda Bed & Breakfast Inn 115 N Summerlin Ave ⓣ407/849-0321 or 1-800/420-6822, ⓦwww.theverandabandb.com. Housed in five period buildings that sit around a courtyard garden and swimming pool, this pretty, but slightly precious, twelve-room bed and breakfast enjoys a good location in the trendy Thornton Park district, one block from Lake Eola. From $99.

Westin Grand Bohemian 325 S Orange Ave ⓣ407/313-9000 or 1-866/663-0024, ⓦwww.grandbohemianhotel.com. Downtown's most luxurious hotel occupies an imposing building across from City Hall, full of works of art and lovely rooms decorated in soothing, earthy tones. Guests have access to a heated outdoor pool and a fitness center. From $329.

Winter Park

See map on pp.144–145.

Best Western Mount Vernon Inn 110 S Orlando Ave, a twenty-minute walk west

of Park Avenue ⓣ407/647-1166 or 1-800/992-3379, ⓦwww.bestwestern.com. A perfectly satisfactory mid-range option with tastefully decorated rooms possessing a homely feel that's uncharacteristic of chain hotels. There's also a pool and a small bar. From $125.

Park Plaza 307 S Park Ave ⓣ407/647-1072 or 1-800/228-7220, ⓦwww.parkplazahotel.com. Reminiscent of New Orleans' French Quarter, this 1920s hotel is stuffed with wonderful wicker furniture and brass fittings. Be sure to book early. A continental breakfast is included. From $130, with balconies from $200.

South of Orlando

Best Western Maingate East 4018 W Vine St ⓣ407/870-2000 or 1-877/444-2407, ⓦwww.bestwestern.com. Well positioned along US-192 with a shopping mall and several restaurants within walking distance, this quiet property offers satisfactory renovated rooms and a pool area affording good views of the small planes landing at the nearby municipal airport. Free shuttle to Disney. From $89.

Celebration Hotel 700 Bloom St ⓣ407/566-6000 or 1-888/499-3800, ⓦwww.celebrationhotel.com. Celebration's only hotel is as upscale and picturesque as the town itself – and one of the most peaceful places to stay in the Orlando area. Most of the compact but elegant rooms overlook the lake, as does the attractive deck with an intimate hot-tub. From $269.

Cypress Cove Nudist Resort & Spa 4425 Pleasant Hill Rd, Kissimmee ⓣ407/933-5870 or 1-888/683-3140, ⓦwww.cypresscoveresort.com. This full-service resort caters to those who like to vacation in the nude. You'll find a range of activities and amenities, including tennis courts, fitness center, swimming pool, restaurants, plus a choice of spacious hotel rooms, apartments, or camping. Rooms from $114, apartments from $151, camping from $48; all rates include a daily membership fee.

Gaylord Palms 6000 W Osceola Parkway ⓣ407/586-0000, ⓦwww.gaylordhotels.com. Dominated by its huge atrium based on an Everglades theme, complete with live alligators, turtles, and snakes, this upscale resort has stylish rooms, particularly in the *Emerald Bay* section. You can relax at the luxurious spa and two swimming pools, and work out in the well-equipped fitness center. From $279.

Howard Johnson Maingate Resort West 8660 W Irlo Bronson Memorial Hwy ⓣ407/396-4500 or 1-800/638-7829, ⓦwww.orlandohojomaingate.com. An elaborate *HoJo* with no less than three pools, two restaurants, tennis, a fitness center, and even a sports field. The atmosphere can be a bit hectic, but with free transportation to the theme parks and renovated rooms sleeping up to five, it's good value. From $59.

Inn Nova Motel 9330 W Irlo Bronson Memorial Hwy, five minutes west of Disney ⓣ863/424-8420 or 1-800/440-4473. The yellow exterior of this cheap and pleasant motel is a foretaste of the bright, cheerful, and slightly garish rooms inside. Continental breakfast and local calls are included. From $50.

Palm Lakefront Resort & Hostel 4840 W Irlo Bronson Memorial Hwy ⓣ407/396-1759, ⓦwww.orlandohostels.com. The obvious choice for backpackers and budget travelers, this hostel has single-sex dorms with six beds or private rooms, a pool, and a pleasant lakefront location. Dorms $19 per person, rooms from $36.

Sevilla Inn 4640 W Irlo Bronson Memorial Hwy ⓣ407/396-4135, ⓦwww.sevillainn.com. A refreshing change from the chain hotels, this unpretentious, privately owned motel has simple, cheap (especially in off-season), and perfectly satisfactory rooms, along with a humble pool. From $57, off-season from $39.

Super 8 Motel Kissimmee Suites 1815 W Vine St ⓣ407/847-6121 or 1-800/325-4348, ⓦwww.abcsuites.com. Choose from standard rooms (sleeping up to four) or apartment-style suites (sleeping up to six) in an attractive garden setting; the latter come complete with full kitchen, living and dining areas, and two bedrooms. Free continental breakfast, local calls, Internet, and shuttle to Disney. Rooms from $80, suites from $100.

Essentials

Arrival

Most people arrive in Orlando via the international airport, from where you'll find numerous public transport and taxi options for getting to anywhere in Orlando. The train and bus stations, meanwhile, are both close to downtown Orlando.

By air

Orlando International Airport (Ⓣ 407/825-2001, Ⓦ www.orlandoairports.net) lies nine miles southeast of downtown Orlando. The local **Lynx buses** (see p.177) link the airport with downtown and International Drive. For downtown, use #11 or #51 (both take around 45 min); for International Drive, use #42 (around 60 min). All buses depart from Level 1 of the airport's Main Terminal (on the "A Side" concourse) every 30 minutes between 5am and 11.30pm for #11, 5.30am and 10.30pm for #51, and 6am to 10.30pm for #42.

More expensive **shuttle buses**, such as those operated by Mears Transportation (Ⓣ 407/423-5566, Ⓦ www.mearstransportation.com), will carry you from the airport to any hotel or motel in the Orlando area. The flat rate from the airport to a hotel in downtown Orlando is $16; to International Drive $17: to Walt Disney World, Lake Buena Vista, or US-192 $19.

A **taxi** (see p.178) to downtown Orlando, International Drive, or the motels on US-192 will cost anywhere from $30 to $60; Walt Disney World is $50 to $60.

All of the main **car rental** companies (see p.185) either have offices in the airport terminal itself or a short, free shuttle bus-ride away.

A second airport, **Orlando/Sanford International** (Ⓣ 407/585-4000, Ⓦ www.orlandosanfordairport.com), is a small but growing facility twenty miles north of downtown Orlando that receives a lot of charter flights from the UK. A taxi from Sanford to downtown Orlando costs around $55; or you could save money by taking a taxi to the Seminole Center, a shopping center on the corner of US-17/92 and Lake Mary, and then catching Lynx #39 into downtown Orlando (every 30 min from 5am to 10.30pm; journey time 70 min).

By bus and train

Long-distance **buses** arrive at the Orlando **Greyhound** terminal, 555 N John Young Parkway (Ⓣ 407/292-3422), from where you can catch Lynx #25 into downtown (every 30 min from 5.30am to 1.20am; journey time 10 min). The majority of long-distance buses also stop at the Kissimmee Greyhound terminal, 103 E Dakin St (Ⓣ 407/847-3911 or 1-888/332-6363), which is a more convenient location if you're staying along US-192.

Arriving by **train**, you'll wind up at the Orlando **Amtrak** station, one and a half miles south of downtown at 1400 Sligh Blvd (Ⓣ 407/843-7611). To get to downtown from here, take Lynx #40 (every hour from 5.30am to 1.20am; journey time 10 min). Trains also stop at

Insider tip

Along with the other perks of staying at a Disney resort (see p.165), is the free transfer from Orlando International Airport to your hotel and vice versa on Disney's Magical Express Transportation. Upon arrival at the airport, make your way to the Disney Welcome Center on Level 1 of the "B Side" concourse. For reservations, call Ⓣ1-866/599-0951.

the station in Kissimmee, 111 E Dakin Ave (ⓣ 407/933-1170), There's another station in Winter Park, 150 W Morse Blvd (ⓣ 407/645-5055).

By car

The major cross-Florida roads intersect in or around Orlando. The **I-4** passes southwest–northeast through Walt Disney World and downtown Orlando and is the road you should take for Tampa and the nearest coastal beaches; **US-192** (the Irlo Bronson Memorial Highway) crosses I-4 just south of Disney and charts an east–west course fifteen miles south of Orlando. **Hwy-528** (the Beeline Expressway) stems from International Drive and heads for the east coast. **Florida's Turnpike** (a toll road) cuts northwest–southeast, avoiding Disney and downtown Orlando altogether, but continues to major destinations in south Florida.

Information

Despite the "Tourist Information Center" signs outside virtually every gift shop and the mass of brochures and magazines available nearly everywhere you look, the best source of reliable information is the **Official Visitor Center**, 8723 International Drive (daily 8.30am–6.30pm; ⓣ 407/363-5872 or 1-800/972-3304, ⓦ www.orlandoinfo.com). Pick up the free *Orlando Official Fun Guide* here, which has information on most of the area's attractions, shops, restaurants, nightlife, and the like. Take a moment to browse through the hundreds of leaflets and coupons or buy the discounted attraction tickets, which are sold until 30 minutes before the center's closing (6pm). The Orlando Magicard (which can be downloaded for free from the Official Visitor Center website) gives savings at a range of attractions, accommodation, restaurants, and shops. You can call a Visitor Center Travel Counselor (ⓣ 1-800/972-3304), who'll book vacation packages and offer useful vacation planning tips.

The **Winter Park Welcome Center**, 151 W Lyman Ave (Mon–Fri 9am–5pm; ⓣ 407/644-8281, ⓦ www.winterpark.org), has good local information and brochures not found at the Official Visitor Center. If you're using the motels along US-192, drop by the equally well stocked **Kissimmee–St Cloud Convention & Visitors Bureau**, 1925 E Irlo Bronson Memorial Hwy, Kissimmee (Mon–Fri 8am–5pm; ⓣ 407/944-2400 or 1-800/333-KISS, ⓦ www.floridakiss.com). The best entertainment guide to the area is the Friday "Calendar" section of the *Orlando Sentinel* newspaper.

In addition to the tourist-office websites, you'll find a wealth of Orlando information on the Web. ⓦ **www.orlandocitybeat.com** is a user-friendly site with a comprehensive listing of cultural events, social gatherings, and nighttime activities; ⓦ **www.orlandoweekly.com** and ⓦ **http://orlando.metromix.com** are two regularly updated sites that give reviews of restaurants, bars, and clubs; ⓦ **www.allearsnet.com** is one of the best "unofficial" guides to Walt Disney World, not least for its listings of menus at every restaurant on Disney property; and ⓦ **www.theotherorlando.com** contains some equally good information on Orlando's other main attractions, including Universal and SeaWorld.

Getting around

Orlando is a sprawling city and, although you can get around on public transportation, it's either very time consuming or expensive depending on the mode you choose. The only place where public transportation is easy, quick (and free) is at Walt Disney World, where buses, boats, and a monorail provide regular links between the attractions and the resorts. Drivers should note that rush-hour traffic in Orlando is severe, so allow extra time if you're driving in the late afternoon and early evening.

Buses

Local **Lynx** buses (ⓣ 407/841-5969, ⓦ www.golynx.com) converge at the downtown **Lynx Central Station**, 455 N Garland Ave. Most routes operate from 6.30am to 8pm on weekdays, 7.30am to 6pm on Sat, and 8am to 6pm on Sun (although sometimes routes don't operate at all on Sun). The only really useful service for visitors who want to use the Lynx buses to get home after dinner or a show is route #8, which serves all points along International Drive until 1.45am on weekdays, 11.45pm on Sat, and 8.40pm on Sun. For those not staying on or near I-Drive, a taxi or shuttle bus (see p.178) are the only practical options for getting around late at night.

You'll need **exact change** ($1.75 one-way; $4 day-pass) if you pay on board; a weekly pass costs $14 and must be bought at the central station. The single fare includes a free transfer to another Lynx bus, valid for travel within 90 minutes of the initial ticket purchase. Given the expanse of the network and the considerable journey times, you'll often be hard-pressed to catch your second bus before the ticket expires.

Insider tip

The Lynx buses make around 4000 stops in three counties and working out how to get where is not always easy. The Official Visitor Center (see opposite) has a very useful handout entitled *Using the Lynx Bus System*, which explains how to get to many points of interest by bus starting from International Drive.

The **I-Ride Trolley** (ⓣ 407/354-5656 or 1-866/243-7483, ⓦ www.iridetrolley.com) serves all points along International Drive (including SeaWorld Orlando), running between the Prime Outlets International shopping mall in the north and Orlando Premium Outlets in the south. It operates roughly every twenty minutes daily from 8am to 10.30pm, costing $1 one-way (seniors over 65 25¢; children under 12 free). One-day passes for unlimited travel are also available for $3. Exact change is required.

Useful Lynx bus routes

From downtown Orlando:
#1 or **#9** to Loch Haven Park and Winter Park
#11 or **#51** to the airport
#8 or **#38** to International Drive (#38 has limited stops and takes just 20 minutes)
#50 to Disney's Magic Kingdom (limited stops; 40-minute journey time)
From International Drive:
#42 to the airport

Getting around the parks

Despite its multitude of attractions and resorts, getting around Walt Disney World is actually quite easy – and free. A large fleet of **buses** links every resort to the main theme parks and other attractions, departing at roughly twenty-minute intervals. Intra-park travel, meanwhile, will sometimes involve changing buses at the Transportation and Ticket Center (TTC), Disney's transportation hub and the place from which to access the Magic Kingdom. Transportation between here, the Magic Kingdom, and EPCOT is via the free **monorail**, or you can take a **ferry** from the dock at the TTC to get across to the Magic Kingdom. Although in theory it's possible to walk from one park to another, distances are deceptively long and there are few pedestrian walkways.

At Universal Orlando, however, the two parks, CityWalk, and the resorts are all easily accessed on foot. An alternative way to get to the resorts is by the **water taxis** (see p.114) that leave from a dock at CityWalk.

Taxis and shuttle buses

Orlando **taxis** are expensive: rates begin at $3.25 for the first mile, plus $1.75 for each additional mile: try Town & Country (☎ 407/828-3035), Star Taxi (☎ 407/857-9999), or Diamond Cab (☎ 407/523-3333).

Cheaper than taxis, but more expensive and quicker than local buses, are the **shuttle buses**, minivans, or coaches run by private companies connecting the main accommodation areas, such as International Drive and US-192, with Walt Disney World, SeaWorld Orlando, and Universal Orlando. You should book at least a day in advance, and confirm a time for your return. Mears Transportation Group (☎ 407/423-5566, Ⓦ www.mearstransportation.com) charges $14–16 for a round-trip ride from International Drive or US-192 to all the major attractions.

Driving

The single most useful route for getting around Orlando by car is the **I-4**, which dissects the city in a southwest–northeast direction and has exits for Walt Disney World, SeaWorld Orlando, International Drive, Universal Orlando, and downtown Orlando. I-4 also intersects with **US-192** (exit 64AB), the busy east–west corridor south of Orlando, which, unlike I-4, is not an Interstate and so has intermittent traffic lights.

There's an $11 **parking** fee at Walt Disney World and Universal Orlando (free for Disney and Universal resort guests), SeaWorld Orlando charges $10, and it's free at Discovery Cove. At the more upscale hotels you often have to pay an additional fee to use their parking facilities. In downtown Orlando, metered parking is in effect during the day; after 6pm and on the weekends parking is free. Finding a space, however, is another matter, particularly on Fri and Sat nights, and city garages and several privately owned parking lots (charging a flat rate of typically $5) cater to the overflow.

Theme park practicalities

The opening hours, ticket prices, and other practicalities of visiting Orlando's main theme parks are explained below.

Walt Disney World

☎407/824-4321, Ⓦwww.disneyworld.com. Opening times vary greatly depending on the park you're visiting and the time of the year. The parks are generally **open** daily from 9am to around 9pm or 10pm during holidays and in the summer, and from 9am to 6pm or later the rest of the year. Disney's Animal Kingdom closes at 5pm year round. During peak seasons the *Orlando Sentinel* lists each park's hours on the front page. Every day, one of the four main parks either opens one hour earlier or closes up to three hours later for **guests of the Disney resorts** only.

The basic single-day, one-park **admission price** is the same for all Disney parks: $71 for adults and $60 for children aged 3 to 9. The **Magic Your Way** option allows you to choose the number of days you wish to spend visiting the parks and pay a significantly reduced price compared with the single-day admission – for example, a seven-day ticket would cost $219 (adult) or $182 (children 3–11). Magic Your Way tickets can be bought for a maximum of ten days and you can only visit one park per day. If you want the freedom to move from park to park in the same day, you must add the **Park Hopper** option for an additional flat fee of $45 on top of the basic Magic Your Way ticket. The **Water Park Fun & More** option allows you to add from two to ten extra admissions (the exact number depends on the length of your basic Magic Your Way ticket) to Blizzard Beach, Typhoon Lagoon, DisneyQuest, Disney's Wide World of Sports, and Pleasure Island for a flat fee of $50. All unused admissions on a ticket expire after fourteen days unless you've bought the No Expiration option for $15–180, depending on the length of your Magic Your Way ticket.

Insider tip

In an effort to **reduce waiting times**, Disney has established the FASTPASS system. At certain attractions you can obtain a FASTPASS by inserting your park ticket into a special FASTPASS ticket station. The machine gives you a slip indicating a one-hour window later in the day when you should return to the attraction. In effect you book a time to enter the FASTPASS line, which gets you into the attraction with little or no wait. Note that you can only hold one FASTPASS for one attraction at any one time. Other techniques for **saving time** and beating the crowds depend on which park you're visiting. Look for advice in "Insider tip" boxes in the individual park accounts. The single most effective way of avoiding the crowds, however, is to visit during the quietest periods, generally January, May, September, and the first three weeks in December. The busiest times are summertime, around Thanksgiving (the fourth Thurs in November), Christmas, and Easter.

Note that Friday is the biggest check-in day at Orlando hotels, while Sunday is the biggest check-out day; at these times it tends to be slightly less crowded at the theme parks. Mondays and Tuesdays are traditionally busy days at the parks.

Disney Line cruises

Disney has been in the cruise ship business since 1998. Its two smart ships, *Disney Magic* and *Disney Wonder*, depart from Port Canaveral, on the east coast, an hour from the theme parks. The ships are designed with the family in mind, but offer touches of luxury – including inlaid Italian woodwork – that will impress regular cruise-goers. The on-board entertainment caters to children and adults alike. You'll find the type of live shows that abound at the theme parks, delighting the little ones with appearances by plenty of Disney characters, but also comedy evenings, piano bars, and nightclubs for adults. Likewise, there's a variety of food and restaurants, ranging from French and Italian cuisine served in elegant dining rooms to buffets and snack bars to satisfy less discriminating palates. The cruises themselves last three, four, or seven days. The three- and four-day options sail to Nassau and then to Disney's own Bahamian island, Castaway Cay. You can create a seven-day package by combining three or four days at sea with the remaining days at a Disney resort, or spend the whole seven days at sea, touring either the Eastern or Western Caribbean. Prices vary considerably depending on when you go and the cabin (or Disney resort) that you choose. Three-day cruises range from $429 to $2999 per person (excluding airfare); four-day cruises are $499 to $3999; and the different types of seven-day cruises are $936 to $5399. Parking is $36, $48, and $84 for the three-, four-, and seven-day cruises respectively, or $12 per day. In addition to the Caribbean cruises, a number of Mediterranean cruises calling at ports in Spain, France, and Italy are available during the spring and summer: ten-night cruises are $2399 to 6699; eleven-night cruises are $2599 to $6699.

For more information, call ⓣ407/939-2784 or 1-800/951-3532 or visit ⓦwww.disneycruiseline.com.

Universal Orlando

Half a mile north of I-4 exits 74B or 75A ⓣ407/363-8000, ⓦwww.uescape.com. Both Universal Studios and Islands of Adventure **open** at 9am and close at any time between 6pm and 10pm depending on the season.

The basic single-day, one-park **admission price** is $71 for adults and $60 for children aged 3 to 9 – exactly the same as Disney. If you want to visit both parks in the same day, the price is $89.95 (adults) and $72.95 (children 3–9). Universal also offers various ways to reduce the cost of admission provided you're prepared to spread your visit over a number of days. A **2-Day/2-Park Ticket** costs $116.95 (adults) and $106.35 (children 3–9), while the **Orlando FlexTicket** offers unlimited admission for fourteen days to both of the Universal parks – as well as SeaWorld Orlando and Wet 'n' Wild – for $194.95 (adults) and $160.95 (children 3–9). Note that discounts – and special Internet-only tickets – are often available if you book through the Universal website. Universal's equivalent to Disney's FASTPASS (see box, p.179) is called **Universal Express** and it works in virtually the same way. To avoid the limitation of being able to hold only one Universal Express pass for one attraction at any one time you can pay $25.99–55.99 (depending on the time of year) for **Universal Express Plus**, which allows you to enter the Universal Express line whenever and wherever you like for the whole day in both parks. **Guests of the Universal resorts** can also join the Universal Express lines simply by presenting their room key-card.

SeaWorld Orlando

Sea Harbor Drive, at the intersection of I-4 and the Beeline Expressway ⓣ407/351-3600 or 1-800/327-2424, ⓦwww.seaworld.com. The park **opens** at 9am and closes at any time between 6pm and 10pm depending on the season.

The basic single-day **admission price** is $64.95 for adults and $53.95 for children aged 3 to 9. The **Orlando Flex-Ticket** also includes SeaWorld.

Discovery Cove

Next to SeaWorld Orlando on Central Florida Parkway Ⓣ 407/370-1280 or 1-877/4-DISCOVERY, Ⓦ www.discoverycove.com. The park is **open** from 9am to 5.30pm throughout the year. The **admission price** for adults and children if you include the dolphin swim is $269 from Jan to mid-March and Nov to mid-Dec, and $289 from mid-March to Oct and during the Christmas period. You can opt to leave out the dolphin swim, in which case the price is $169 from Jan to mid-March and Nov to mid-Dec, and $189 from mid-March to October and during the Christmas period. Since the number of guests is limited to no more than 1000 per day, you must make a reservation to visit Discovery Cove. For visits including the dolphin swim, reserve one to three months in advance; otherwise, reserve at least three weeks ahead of time. All tickets include admission to either SeaWorld Orlando or Busch Gardens for seven consecutive days.

Busch Gardens

3000 E Busch Blvd, Tampa, two miles east of I-275 or two miles west of I-75 Ⓣ 1-888/800-5447, Ⓦ www.buschgardens.com. The park generally **opens** at 9am or 9.30am and closes between 6pm and 9pm.

The basic single-day **admission price** is $61.95 for adults and $51.95 for children aged 3 to 9. The **Orlando FlexTicket** can be extended to cover Busch Gardens for $239.95 (adults) and $199.95 (children 3–9). This includes a free shuttle bus to the park from Orlando (for departure times and pick-up points, call Ⓣ 1-800/221-1339).

Festivals and events

Late January

Zora Neale Hurston Festival of the Arts and Humanities Ⓣ 407/647-3131, Ⓦ www.zoranealehurstonfestival.com. Taking over the historic town of Eatonville (see p.142) for five days, this festival celebrates African-American culture. You can buy a ticket at the gate to enter the festival grounds, where you'll witness music, dance, and theatrical performances.

Mid-February

Daytona 500 Ⓣ 386/254-2700 or 1-800/748-7467, Ⓦ www.daytonainternationalspeedway.com. This is the most prestigious stock-car race in NASCAR's Nextel Cup Series. Tickets are expensive ($99 and up) and should be bought well in advance from the Daytona International Speedway.

Silver Spurs Rodeo Ⓣ 407/677-6336, Ⓦ www.silverspursrodeo.com. The largest rodeo east of the Mississippi gets going for three days in the Silver Spurs Arena in Kissimmee, where cowboys come from all over to compete for prize-money in the thousands of dollars.

Late February/early March

Bach Festival Ⓣ 407/646-2182, Ⓦ www.bachfestivalflorida.org. Top musicians, orchestras, and choirs converge on Rollins College in Winter Park to pay homage to the works of Bach and other composers.

Early March

Daytona Bike Week Ⓦ www.officialbikeweek.com. Motorcycle races, rallies and parades, plenty of posing, and a spot of raucous behavior thrown in for good measure epitomize this famous annual gathering of thousands of bikers in the seaside town of Daytona Beach.

Mid-March

Arnold Palmer Invitational
Ⓣ 407/876-7774 or 1-866/764-4843, Ⓦ www.arnoldpalmerinvitational.com. The

PGA Tour comes to Orlando twice a year to stage professional golf tournaments. This one takes place at the Bay Hill Golf Club; the other – the Children's Miracle Network Classic in early Nov – is played at Disney's Magnolia and Palm golf courses.

Late March/early April

Florida Film Festival ⓣ407/644-6579, ⓦwww.floridafilmfestival.com. A well-respected event on the US film festival circuit, showcasing documentaries, narrative and short films, animation, and films from Florida, many of them screened at the Enzian Theater in Maitland (see p.186).

Mid-March to early June

EPCOT International Flower and Garden Festival ⓣ407/934-7639. Each weekend of the festival features lectures on gardening, bugs, and even making perfume, along with more light-hearted entertainment, all against the backdrop of EPCOT's stunning flower displays made from 30 million blooms.

Late May

Orlando International Fringe Festival ⓣ407/648-0077, ⓦwww.orlandofringe.org. A ten-day event where over 300 performers perform 500 shows, from drama and musicals to comedy and mime.

Early June

Gay Days ⓣ407/896-8431 or 1-888/942-9329, ⓦwww.gaydays.com. Over 100,000 gays and lesbians descend on Walt Disney World and Universal Orlando, visiting the parks by day and filling Downtown Disney's clubs at night. The event lasts four days.

July 4

All of the main theme parks put on some kind of special display involving plenty of flag waving, patriotic music, and fireworks for American Independence Day. There are also games, entertainment, and yet more fireworks around Lake Eola in downtown Orlando.

Late September to early November

Halloween Horror Nights ⓣ407/363-8000, ⓦwww.halloweenhorrornights.com. On selected nights during the Halloween period, several haunted houses are built in one (or sometimes both) of the Universal theme parks and live actors do their best to scare the living daylights out of you – usually with great success.

Late October

Festival Calle Orange ⓣ407/381-5310, ⓦwww.renesproductions.com. This weekend street festival celebrating Orlando's Hispanic culture brings plenty of Latino music, dancing, food, and energy to downtown's Orange Avenue.

Sports and recreation

In addition to its theme parks, Orlando has a great choice of recreational activities. Even the humblest of hotels will have a swimming pool, while at the larger resorts you'll often find fitness centers and tennis courts. Disney also offers a wide range of watersports, from parasailing to wakeboarding. Elsewhere in (or near) Orlando you can do activities such as horseback riding, hot-air ballooning, boat trips, and even stock-car driving, all of which have been described in Places. Below are some other suggestions of things to do.

Golf

There are over 125 golf courses in the Greater Orlando area. Green fees can vary from around $50 to well over $100 for eighteen holes depending on when and where you play. The rates normally include the rental of an electric cart. Walt Disney World alone has five eighteen-hole golf courses, including the Magnolia and Palm courses which host a PGA Tour professional golf tournament (see opposite). To book tee times at a Disney course, call ⓣ407/939-4653. Some of the Orlando area's other highly regarded courses include: Celebration Golf Club, 701 Golf Park Drive, Celebration (ⓣ407/566-4653, ⓦwww.celebrationgolf.com; green fees $57–145), Falcon's Fire, 3200 Seralago Blvd, Kissimmee (ⓣ407/239-5445, ⓦwww.falconsfire.com; green fees $70–157), and the El Campeon course at Mission Inn, 10400 County Rd 48, Howey-in-the-Hills – 35 minutes northwest of Orlando (ⓣ1-800/874-9053, ⓦwww.missioninnresort.com; green fees $65–130). For further descriptions and rates of Orlando courses, visit ⓦwww.playfloridagolf.com.

Cycling

Cycling isn't a practical option for getting around Orlando because the distances are simply too long and few of the roads are suitable (or safe) for cyclists. However, if you'd like to explore the countryside on two wheels, the nearest **bike trail** is the nineteen-mile West Orange Trail, starting just west of Orlando at the County Line Station (take Hwy-50 towards Clermont) and ending in the town of Apopka. **Rent bikes** at West Orange Trail Bikes & Blades, located along the trail at 17914 Hwy-438, Winter Garden (ⓣ407/877-0600 or 1-888/281-3341, ⓦwww.orlandobikerental.com; $6 per hour, $30 per day).

Spas

Some of the more upscale resorts such as the *Ritz-Carlton Orlando*, *Gaylord Palms*, and Disney's *Grand Floridian Resort & Spa* have onsite spas offering the full range of massages and other treatments to guests and non-guests alike. You'll generally find a few treatments specifically designed for men, as well as for children. Expect to pay around $300 for a spa package that includes three treatments.

Directory

AIRLINES

Aer Lingus ⓣ1-800/474-4247, ⓦwww.aerlingus.com; **Air Canada** ⓣ1-888/247-2262, ⓦwww.aircanada.com; **Air Transat** ⓣ1-866/847-1112, ⓦwww.airtransat.com; **American Airlines** ⓣ1-800/433-7300, ⓦwww.aa.com; **British Airways** ⓣ1-800/AIRWAYS, ⓦwww.ba.com; **Continental Airlines domestic** ⓣ1-800/523-FARE, international ⓣ1-800/231-0856, ⓦwww.continental.com; **Delta domestic** ⓣ1-800/221-1212, international ⓣ1-800/241-4141, ⓦwww.delta.com; **Northwest domestic** ⓣ1-800/225-2525, international ⓣ1-800/447-4747, ⓦwww.nwa.com; **United Airlines domestic** ⓣ1-800/864-8331, international ⓣ1-800/538-2929, ⓦwww.united.com; **US Airways domestic** ⓣ1-800/428-4322, international ⓣ1-800/622-1015, ⓦwww.usairways.com; **Virgin Atlantic** ⓣ1-800/821-5438, ⓦwww.virgin-atlantic.com.

BANKS AND MONEY

Banks are generally open Mon–Thurs 10am–3pm, Fri 10am–5pm. Credit and debit cards are accepted everywhere. You can either use them to pay for things directly or withdraw money from ATM machines (note that ATM withdrawals using credit cards are treated as cash advances, with interest accruing daily). US-dollar travelers' checks can be used in shops, restaurants, and the like, or cashed in banks. Travelers' checks in other currencies are more difficult to change.

CAR RENTAL

All the main car-rental firms have offices at or close to Orlando International Airport. Always book in advance for savings and note that demand is strong during busy seasons. Rates are high at around $45 per

Fly Less – Stay Longer!

Rough Guides believes in the good that travel does, but we are deeply aware of the impact of fuel emissions on climate change. We recommend taking fewer trips and staying for longer. If you can avoid traveling by air, please use an alternative, especially for journeys of under 1000km/600miles. And always offset your travel at ⓦwww.roughguides.com/climatechange.

day or $250 per week for a mid-sized car. **Alamo** ⓣ1-800/462-5266, ⓦwww.alamo.com; **Avis** ⓣ1-800/331-1212, ⓦwww.avis.com; **Budget** ⓣ1-800/527-0700, ⓦwww.budget.com; **Dollar** ⓣ1-800/800-3665, ⓦwww.dollar.com; **National** ⓣ1-800/227-7368, ⓦwww.nationalcar.com.

CINEMAS

Orlando's cinemas tend to be in out-of-the-way shopping malls. The most easily accessible multi-screen complexes, which show the latest Hollywood releases, are in Downtown Disney, CityWalk, and along International Drive at Pointe Orlando and the Festival Bay Mall. If you're staying along US-192, there's an AMC Cinema nearby in the town of Celebration. Many of the films shown during the Florida Film Festival (see p.182) are at the Enzian Theater, 1300 S Orlando Ave, Maitland.

CONSULATES

France 7657 Mount Carmel Drive ⓣ407/292-1142; **Netherlands** Suite 3, 4248 Town Center Blvd ⓣ407/702-6620, ⓦwww.nlconsulateorlando.com; **UK** Suite 2110, 200 S Orange Ave ⓣ407/254-3300, ⓦwww.britainusa.com/orlando.

DOCTORS

Doc at your Door (house calls) ⓣ407/970-3138.

ELECTRICITY

110V AC.

EMERGENCIES

For police, fire, or ambulance services, call ⓣ911.

GAY AND LESBIAN VISITORS

Orlando's gay scene is nowhere near as vibrant as it is farther south in places such as Key West and Fort Lauderdale. There is, however, a handful of bars and clubs for gays and lesbians as well as sporadic social events. Gay Days (see p.182) in early June draws hundreds of thousands of gays and lesbians to the area. Keep abreast of what's going on at ⓦwww.gayorlando.com.

INTERNET

Many hotels have one or two public computers with Internet access – either in fancy "business centers" at the more upscale establishments, for which there's a charge of around $10 per hour, or often free at the budget hotels. You'll also find Wi-Fi Hotspots in some cafés, shopping malls, and other public places.

POST OFFICES

Post offices are generally open Mon to Fri 9am–5pm and Sat 9am–noon. The actual branches, however, are often stuck out in shopping malls and other obscure locations, so posting letters and postcards is more practically done using the blue mail boxes found on street corners or through your hotel concierge. One location relatively close to the resorts around Disney is at the Shoppes at Buena Vista ⓣ407/238-0223 (Mon–Fri 9am–4pm, Sat 9am to noon).

TAX

A 6.5 percent sales tax is added to virtually everything you buy in a shop, as well as to things such as theme park tickets (park admission prices have been given excluding tax in this book). Expect a 12.5 percent tax to be added to bills at Orlando hotels, 13 percent at Kissimmee hotels.

TIPPING

Generally, you should tip 15–20 percent in a restaurant, 15 percent for a taxi, a dollar or two for valet parking and $1 per item carried by a hotel porter. This is not an exhaustive list, however, and tips will be expected in a variety of other situations.

TRAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES

Orlando is very well equipped for visitors with disabilities. The major theme parks are all wheelchair-friendly, as are city buses. Many hotels have rooms specifically designed to meet the needs of the disabled and most public buildings have at least one toilet for the disabled. Many attractions and services also have a special phone line dedicated to the hearing impaired.

small print & Index

A Rough Guide to Rough Guides

In 1981, Mark Ellingham, a recent graduate in English from Bristol University, was traveling in Greece on a tiny budget and couldn't find the right guidebook. With a group of friends he wrote his own guide, combining a contemporary, journalistic style with a practical approach to traveler's needs. That first Rough Guide was a student scheme that became a publishing phenomenon. Today, Rough Guides include recommendations from shoestring to luxury and cover hundreds of destinations around the globe, including almost every country in the Americas and Europe, more than half of Africa, and most of Asia and Australasia. Millions of readers relish Rough Guides' wit and inquisitiveness as much as their enthusiastic, critical approach and value-for-money ethos. The guides' ever-growing team of authors and photographers is spread all over the world.

In the early 1990s, Rough Guides branched out of travel, with the publication of Rough Guides to World Music, Classical Music, and the Internet. All three have become benchmark titles in their fields, spearheading the publication of a range of more than 350 titles under the Rough Guide name, including phrasebooks, waterproof maps, music guides from Opera to Heavy Metal, reference works as diverse as Conspiracy Theories and Shakespeare, and popular culture books from iPods to Poker. Rough Guides also produce a series of more than 120 World Music CDs in partnership with World Music Network.

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The publishers and authors have done their best to ensure the accuracy and currency of all the information in **Orlando DIRECTIONS**, however, they can accept no responsibility for any loss, injury, or inconvenience sustained by any traveler as a result of information or advice contained in the guide.

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Help us update

We've gone to a lot of effort to ensure that the second edition of **Orlando DIRECTIONS** is accurate and up-to-date. However, things change – places get "discovered", opening hours are notoriously fickle, restaurants and rooms raise prices or lower standards. If you feel we've got it wrong or left something out, we'd like to know, and if you can remember the address, the price, the phone number, so much the better.

Please send your comments with the subject line "**Orlando DIRECTIONS Update**" to Ⓔmail@roughguides.com. We'll credit all contributions and send a copy of the next edition (or any other Rough Guide if you prefer) for the very best emails.
Have your questions answered and tell others about your trip at Ⓦcommunity.roughguides.com

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